Dotawo ▸
A Journal of Nubian Studies

2026 #9

Nubian Homescapes

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Nubian Homescapes from Antiquity to the Present

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A homescape in the Kerma region, Sudanese Nubia.
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2. An open-access journal of Nubian studies, providing a cross-disciplinary platform for historians, linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scholars interested in all periods and aspects of Nubian civilization.

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2. Ele ne Nuba poccikan muɟallayane, aal poccika yaa əərngaanyatn, taariikiro, aallo, elekon poon ammik(i) ir ayin ir kanniyam pirro, poon ammik(i) aallo, elek(i) aallo poccikaa yaa əərngaanyatn.**

* Translation into Nobiin courtesy of Mohamed K. Khalil.
** Translation into Midob Nubian courtesy of Ishag A. Hassan.

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Nubian Homescapes: An Introduction

Anna Lucille Boozer

This volume goes to press as a war once again threatens homelife in Sudan. This conflict, which began in April 2023, has created the largest internally displaced population in the world — well over one million at this stage, although firm numbers are difficult to come by. In addition to displacement, some communities, such as Darfur, face genocide. And yet this conflict has escaped international attention and outrage. This war is not remote to the individuals who contributed to this volume, some of whom were themselves displaced by warfare. Others search for information to support friends and colleagues who remain in Sudan. And still others give us optimism while they work with diaspora comunities to heal the trauma of war, displacement, and genocide. Themes of homescape and displacement weave through these contemporary experiences, demonstrating the continued relevance of these topics today.

This volume takes a long-term perspective on Nubian houses and households to explore the distinctive material, visual, and phenomenological worlds of Nubian homescapes. Nubia extends from the area around Aswan in Egypt to the contemporary town of Debba in Sudan, a region that roughly corresponds to the area between the First and Fourth Cataracts along the Nile. Nubians have existed as a distinct ethno-linguistic group since ancient times.[1]

Contributors to this volume of *Dotawo* explore homelife during periods when there were changes in the political and social organization in Nubia. By exploring a range of case studies that include objects, bodies, households, floral remains, workspaces, houses, and art we aim to understand how ordinary people made and continue to make their homes and livelihoods during periods of systemic change. In the process, we consider how these same

1 For a basic geographic and temporal introduction to Nubia, see Janmyr, "The Nubians of Egypt: A Displaced Population."

sources reveal the power of everyday activities to transform broad social organizations from the bottom up. We also explore how some ancient social practices in Nubia might live on and continue to structure life in the present.

Many of our contributors have explored homescapes creatively, remaining attentive to the multisensory, embodied, and intersectional ways that people experienced the home. We have encouraged these creative approaches because they capture the essence of homescapes better than academic prose alone. For this reason, this volume of *Dotawo* includes photographic essays, artwork, and fiction in addition to sociological, anthropological, archaeological, and linguistic approaches to the topic.

This introduction situates the themes that structure the volume — homescapes, resettlement, and the *longue durée*. A brief history of the Nubian diaspora provides insights into this step change in Nubian lifeways and suggests comparisons for how contemporary displaced communities can move forward. And, finally, I introduce the twelve contributions to this volume, which range from ancient to contemporary Nubian society and span a range of disciplines — archaeology, art, sociology, history, linguistics, and cultural anthropology among them.

Homescapes

People often define *home* as a place where one lives permanently, usually as a member of a family or household. But home is more than a physical place and the people contained within it. Home is also where people tend to feel most at ease because they are familiar with the sounds, smells, and patterns of life within and beyond house walls.

Meanwhile, *homescapes* may be defined as the physical or symbolic landscapes of one's home or homeland. In this way, a homescape may be as palpable as a house and its surrounding environs. Or it might be more ethereal. For example, an individual's accent might evoke feelings of home and inclusion to a native speaker who hears them speak, as Asmaa Taha describes in her contribution to this volume.

Tim Ingold invented the term *taskscape* as a play on the word *landscape*. In his words, "just as a landscape is an array of features, so — by analogy — is the taskscape an array of related activities."[2] We define our own term *homescape* in a similar manner — as an array of features related to the home. A homescape, then, is a socially constructed space of human activity, understood as having spatial, conceptual, or emotional boundaries and delimitations.

2 Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape."

Central to Ingold's definition is that the taskscape is a perpetual process rather than a static or immutable entity. We, too, consider the malleability of homescape to be a key component of its definition. Concepts of homescape thus contain a dichotomy within them — they rely on both deep histories of connection as well as fluid processes of formation and reformation. People actively make their homescapes as they go about their everyday lives. They forge a home from the land, imbuing it with memory, meaning, and significance.[3] This agency within everyday life, even amid circumstances of forced relocation, is at the forefront of many contributions to this volume.

Diasporas, whether voluntary or enforced, rupture concepts of *home* and *homescape.* The dispersion of a people from their original homeland creates scattered communities that combine their homeland with their new place of residence. These amalgamations between homeland and new home are complicated by the circumstances surrounding the mainspring of relocation.

People who have been forced to leave their homeland due to war, persecution, or natural disaster cannot make a new home so easily. Displaced people, and especially those who are displaced within the borders of their own country (known as Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs), are among the most vulnerable people in the world. They are often trapped in a protracted temporary housing status for years or even decades. Although they remain within the borders of their nation state, they rarely receive the assistance they require to make a new, stable home. Instead, many continue to flee from one place to another in a neverending quest for adequate shelter, water, food, and medical care. This situation describes the experiences of displaced persons who remain in Sudan at the moment this volume goes to press.

Displaced persons are usually severed from their original vocations, communities, and even families. In such precarious conditions, these individuals are left to forge new identities with each new residence — each locale they encounter offers them new opportunities to pursue while losing out others.

The hope that Khalid Shatta offers with his artwork, outreach activities, and long-term perspectives, helps assuage some of the hopelessness that may arise when considering these circumstances. His painting (Figure 12.14) depicts a crowd of people who have fled the war in Sudan for Cairo. Their minds appear to be preoccupied with their homes and the war they have left behind. This disembodied rumination on homescape captures the essence of

3 Alice Yao described this process for the people who were relocated to live along the Great Wall in Han China. See Yao, "The Great Wall as Destination? Archaeology of Migration and Settlers under the Han Empire."

forced resettlement and diaspora more succinctly than any words I can put down here.

Even those who move their home under less violent circumstances have to cope with the ruptures of making a new home in a different physical space as Amany Sadiq, Maher Habbob, Menna Agha, and Armgard Goo-Grauer describe in their articles. It also involves confronting linguistic differences and even offensive stereotypes, as Asmaa Taha explains. There is hope as well as struggle when finding a new place in the world, as Khalid Shatta recounted during the course of our interview. Although far from Sudan, Shatta explained how feelings of home have never evaporated for him. Instead, visions of homescape endure and adapt, allowing individuals to forge new senses of self and home as they remake their lives.

Nubian Homelife and the Nubian Diaspora

Concepts of home, homelife, and homescape have been present since ancient times, as Hamad Hamdeen, Kate Fulcher, Sarah Shrader, and Elsa Yvanez demonstrate in their contributions to this volume. It is challenging to identify emotional and conceptual relations to home in the material residues of past lives. These contributors tackled this challenge by using a wide range of methodological and theoretical vantages.

Meanwhile, the Nubian diaspora has complicated easy encapsulations of early modern and contemporary Nubian homescapes. The Nubian diaspora is itself complex. While many Nubians were involuntarily displaced from their homes, others dispersed of their own volition in pursuit of opportunities beyond their homeland. This is certainly true of the Nubians of southern Egypt. Many Egyptian Nubian men had sought employment outside of Nubia for centuries, returning to their homeland only periodically. In her photo essay, Anne Jennings discusses this traditional Egyptian Nubian economy prior to the erection of the first dam along the Nile in 1903 as well as the impact of this and other modifications over the years.

The raising of the High Dam in the 1960s led to significant changes in Nubian homescapes. That construction completely flooded the area between the First and Second Cataracts, and forced approximately 50,000 Nubians to resettle in the thirty-three villages built to accommodate them near the town of Kom Ombo. Several villages near the town of Aswan were not in danger of inundation and so the villagers were not removed.

The new villages near Kom Ombo were a shock and a disappointment to those who resettled there. Nevertheless, they did

their best to recreate their old environment, homes, and lifeways. Some traditions survived, while others shifted, as Menna Agha, Argard Goo-Grauer, Maher Habbob, and Amany Sadeq describe in their contributions to the volume. Anne M. Jennings also reminds us that significant changes took place even among those who were able to remain in their villages near Awan. Homescapes are always in a state of flux, even though they are deeply entangled with endurance and memory.

Many Nubians, both male and female, are now living internationally in countries such as the United States (especially in New York and Virginia), England (especially in London), France, (especially in Paris), Switzerland, and Germany, as well as in Egypt (namely, in Cairo and Alexandria in addition to the Kom Ombo region).[4] Some of these communities struggle against racism and pressures to conform to local cultures at the cost of preserving their own lifeways. Others have identified new opportunities and advantages unavailable to them in their homeland. Past homescapes continue to haunt how individuals perceive and act in their new settings.

Contributions

The contributors to this volume approach homescapes from broad temporal, geographic, and disciplinary standpoints. Despite these differences, common themes arose among the contributions, such as the value of the surrounding landscape in creating homescapes (e.g. Sadeq, Tsakos, Fulcher, Hamad) and the need to describe and interact with the home creatively in the form of words or images (Fulcher, Shatta, Jennings, Goo-Grauer). Given the rich connections between them, these papers could be grouped in any number of ways. Here, however, I decided to focus on themes of craftwork, displacement, and the *longue durée* since they repeated in so many of the contributions.

Craftwork and labor

Many contributors explored craftwork and labor, demonstrating how work helps to define and make a homescape. Hamad Hamdeen delved into the plant remains found in the mudbricks used to construct Christian sites in Nubia. Brickmakers added these plant remains and other debris — collectively known as chaff — to mudbricks to increase their strength and durability. These plant

4 For an overview of the four main waves of Nubian settlement in Cairo from 1902 until 1964, see Youssef and Madbouly, "Displaced People and Migrants in Cairo."

remains are small, sometimes invisible to the naked eye. And yet they contain within them a wealth of information about the materials people used in and around the home. These remains shed light on pharmacy, food and drink consumption, home construction, and fodder, among other aspects of everyday life. Hamdeen makes a strong argument for making mudbrick analysis a mainstay of archaeological research through his careful analysis of four significant Christian sites in the Mahas region of Sudan.

While bioarchaeology has been a mainstay of archaeological research since its inception, Sarah Schrader takes a unique vantage on human remains. Using bioarchaeological methods, Schrader demonstrates the frequency with which individuals assumed a squatting position. People squatted while working — cooking, cleaning, taking care of children — as well as when they drank tea or chatted with a neighbor. In other words, ancient Nubians spent a lot of time in a squatting position. Schrader's approach offers us a peak into the everyday postures people assumed in and around their homes in antiquity.

Elsa Yvanez delves into the world of work in her exploration of textile activities in Sudan during the Meroitic Period (*ca.* 300 BCE — 400 CE), a time when Meroë served as the capital of the Kingdom of Kush. She draws together the surviving material signatures of weaving — spindle whorls, and loom weights most particularly — to understand where and how people incorporated textile work into village and city life during the Meroitic Period. Her analysis reveals that this craftwork took place in domestic spaces as well as more formalized multi-use industrial areas. She found that textile production was ubiquitous, taking place in, around, and outside of the home. This result underscores the centrality of textiles to the social, economic and work lives of people living in Meroitic Nubia.

Finally, Kate Fulcher explores painting materials used in ancient and contemporary Nubia as a way of accessing the complex entanglements of everyday life. She explains how people see the landscapes around them as palettes for decorating their homes. She found ancient evidence of color-harvesting in the form of raw pigment lumps, the paintings themselves, and the residue found on grinding stones. Fulcher's ethnoarchaeological research compliments this material evidence since informants provide insights into the decisions and practices linked to acquiring and using pigment to decorate their homes. Fulcher gathers together this suite of evidence into a fictional narrative aimed at making past lives palpable and accessible.

Resettlement

Feelings of displacement, due to architectural, social, and linguistic differences pulse throughout the contributions that describe Nubian resettlement in the wake of the Aswan High Dam construction. Although there had been dams and diasporas before the final raising of the dam, this last raising served as a key turning point for Nubian homescapes.[5]

Menna Agha explores the deep disappointment many Nubian settlers felt when they beheld the unfamiliar houses offered to them in what they called *at-Tahjīr,* the "place of displacement." The Egyptian State refers to *at-Tahjīr* as "New Nubia," a considerably more optimistic term that evades common Nubian sentiment. Evasion can be found throughout the resettlement process, as Agha describes in her essay. The Egyptian state prized optimization and productivity in their house designs rather than understanding the home as the fulcrum of everyday Nubian life. They left the views of Nubian women, who were deeply involved in placemaking, completely out of their planning. Agha shows us how villagers refashioned these prefabricated domestic spaces in a "Nubian way" once they took over the barren houses offered to them.

Maher Habbob delves into a comparison of architectural and landscape features before and after the resettlement. He does so by looking closely at the legal, economic, social, and architectural upheavals that took place at the village of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya during the various constructions of the Low Dam and High Dam at Aswan. The resettlement of this village resulted in a radically different environment and alien houses — neither of which accounted for traditional Nubian social understandings of homescapes. It was left to the villagers to remodel their new houses to make them into homes.

Amany Abdelsadeq Sayed Hussein explores how the people of Abu Hor, a Kenuz Nubian village, remade their homes and homeland in the aftermath of their displacement in December 1964. In doing so, she also examines her grandfather's house. Sadeq's interest in her family's experience of resettlement and making a home resonates with her theoretical framework about senses of home. Her work underscores the importance of the social and emotional components of homescapes as well as the materiality of place and landscape.

Although these individuals creatively remodeled domestic space to better suit traditional Nubian ways of dwelling in their new homes, some traditions inevitably fell by the wayside. Armgard Goo-

5 The High Dam (*as-Sad al-ʿĀli*) was completed in 1970. The reservoir reached its full capacity six years later.

Grauer's photographic essay of bridal rooms explores one of these traditional practices that was lost with the resettlement. Bridal rooms had served as a form of female self-expression at a critical time in a Nubian woman's life course. Women carefully selected, created, and combined objects and images in a single room as a hypnotic symbol of their new roles as wives in a household. Considerable emotional and creative labor went into the creation of these rooms and yet the practice ended abruptly with the resettlement of Nubians into prefabricated houses. These houses had no space for such rooms and Goo-Grauer describes how female decorative ambitions refocused onto furnishings more commonplace across Egypt more broadly.

Meanwhile, the photographic essay by Anne M. Jennings reminds us that not all Egyptian Nubians were resettled. Jennings shows us the houses Nubians still occupy in the villages around Aswan. Although these houses have deep roots in the Nubian community, they too have been refashioned over the years to accommodate the changing needs and desires of their occupants. For example, in the five years between her 1981 and 1986 visits to Gubba, Jennings witnessed the transition from traditional materials such as mud brick and mud plaster, to stone and tin. This change, while less comfortable, allowed families to add a second storey to their house, which is itself another departure from traditional Nubian house design. By 2007, these Gubba houses had acquired tile floors, air conditioning, glass windows, and modern appliances in kitchens and bathrooms. These homes offer a powerful account of incremental change driven by individuals in contrast to the ruptures experienced by the uprooted Nubian communities described by other contributors in this volume.

Finally, Asmaa Taha's article examines how Egyptians characterize Nubians by the way they speak Arabic, their mannerisms, their dress, and other visual signifiers. Egyptian media, particularly in the form of accessible soap operas and songs, fuel negative stereotypes of Nubians. Taha spoke with Native Nobiin speakers to understand their perception of these visual and linguistic stereotypes. Her informants offered a diversity of views on these stereotypes — age and gender seemed to have had critical influences on how they understood these representations.

Longue durée

In his review of Derek Welsby's edited volume, *Archaeology by the Fourth Nile Cataract,* Alexandros Tsakos takes up two themes that pulse through many of the contributions to this volume — the *longue durée* of Nubian homescapes and the loss of homelands. Archaeological work in the region of the Fourth Cataract, like much

of Nubia, came into being as a salvage expedition. Such expeditions have advantages and disadvantages — they take an enviably wide-ranging cultural and disciplinary scope, but are painfully limited by time and resources. Tsakos describes how these limits are noticeable in both the scope of the research conducted and in the eventual volume. Tsakos dwells in particular on the homescapes of the Manasir, which were documented before their ancestral lands were flooded. He makes a strong argument for careful documentation and sensitive publication given the ruptures created by this indescribable loss.

Finally, in my interview with Khalid Shatta, he often took a long-term perspective on Sudan, on his artwork, and on himself. He mused on the enduring issues in Sudan that create repeated patterns of loss and resilience over the course of thousands of years. Shatta's reflection on his own life as a Sudanese expatriate illustrates the emotional complexity of homescapes and diaspora. His present home allows his mind and body the freedom to produce art in a way that was not possible for him in Sudan. Meanwhile, Sudan remains deeply embedded in his artwork — individuals from his hometown, emotions about the current war, and symbols of both ancient and contemporary life appear and reappear throughout his works. While his art does not avoid undercurrents of violence, unrest, or displacement, it is also beautiful, haunting, and even comforting. Here, Shatta shows us how one might harmonize between the before and after of the homescapes that have been ruptured by war, resettlement, and everyday change.

A Home for *Nubian Homescapes*

When approaching a topic like Nubian homescapes, it is necessary to tear down the walls between disciplines and genres. The complex emotional and material terrain of homescapes requires art, photographic essays, fiction, and a suite of academic approaches to navigate it. *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies* is an appropriate home for these intertwining perspectives. *Dotawo* has been open access since its launch in 2014. It welcomes contributions from a diverse range of disciplines, languages, and genres. I cannot imagine publishing a volume such as this one anywhere else, both because I firmly believe that accessibility is an ethical issue and because most journals remained siloed by discipline and genre. I am grateful to *Dotawo* for making this volume possible, to the contributors for pursuing unique vantages on Nubian homescapes, and to the people of Sudan who are on our minds and in our hearts now more than ever.

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From Homescape to Flora Landscape: A Preliminary Observation on Plant Remains from the Christian Mud-Buildings in the Third Cataract Region

Hamad Hamdeen

Mudbrick materials provide a source of environmental data to aid in understanding the diversity of local sediments and flora. Most studies begin with examining the origins of brick materials, which also can be studied as chronological markers, technology as social practice, as indicators of social class or cultural identity, and as a source of environmental information.[1] Given the active role of architecture as material culture mudbricks are a good source of botanical evidence since they often include desiccated chaff, straw, fruits, and seeds, chaff impressions, phytoliths, diatoms, and pollen.[2]

Archaeologically, earth construction techniques have been known for over 9000 years. Mudbrick (adobe) houses dating from 8000 to 6000 BCE have been discovered in Russian Turkestan.[3] Rammed earth foundations dating from ca. 5000 BCE have been discovered in Assyria. Earth was used as the building material in all

1 Alvaro et al., "The Study of the Fourth Millennium Mudbricks at Arslantepe"; Arpin and Goldberg, "Using Optical Microscopy to Evaluate Human History"; Morgenstein and Redmount, "Mudbrick Typology, Sources and Sedimentological Composition."

2 On the active role of architecture as material culture, see Love "Architecture as Material Culture"; Riggs, *The Architecture of Grasshopper Pueblo.* On mudbrick as a good source for botanical evidence, see Henn et al., "Desiccated Diaspores from Building Materials." On chaff impressions, see Wilcox and Fornite, "Impressions of Wild Cereal Chaff." On phytoliths, see Ryan, "The Phytolith Evidence." On diatoms, see Flower, "Diatoms in Ancient Building Materials." On pollen, see Ayyad et al., "Mudbrick as Bearer of Agricultural Information"; O' Rourke, "Pollen from Adobe Brick."

3 Pumpelly, *Explorations in Turkestan.*

ancient cultures, not only for homes but for religious buildings as well.[4] In Sudan, the study of earthen construction materials is very rare, mudbricks were considered common building materials that were used in Sudan from 2500 BCE, during the Kerma period, and are still widely used as building materials in many regions of Sudan. The materials used to make these bricks include Nile mud, sand, chopped straw, and animal dung. Makers mixed these materials in varying quantities to produce bricks with different characteristics.

Most importantly, these added materials vastly improve the tensile strength of bricks. Straw, and sometimes chaff, has always been the preferred type of temper. Alternatives may include chopped grasses or weeds, tree bark, and potsherds.[5] Hillman appropriately distinguishes between various classes of vegetal temper according to their derivation from the process of winnowing and coarse-sieving cereals, highlighting their commonly assigned different uses.[6] The first type, "fragmented light straw," is probably the type of vegetal temper most commonly used in mudbricks. The second type, "medium-coarse winnowed straw," features more commonly in mud plaster or is used as fuel; and the third is "chaff," which results from a later step during cereal processing, and may be used for bricks or wall plaster.[7]

From a general view of home architecture in ancient Sudan, two types of homescapes can be distinguished: external and internal, in which plants are essential elements in both. Plant remains can help us to understand the architectural style of houses of the external homescape, such as wood, which represents an essential part of the architectural construction elements in mud buildings, as it has been used as roofs and pillars to support the roofs of buildings since early periods in Sudan. Also, hardwood trees represent an essential architectural element in the design and decoration of doors and windows. Also, in this type of home, *rākūba* or *ʿarīsha* is a crucial element of the house and is used for recreation and protection from the sun and heat during the hot summer seasons. Many trunks, stems and branches of trees are used in its construction of *rākūba,* in addition to palm and doum fronds. The trunks and stems of large trees also play an essential role in the building of animal pens.

As for the elements of the interior homescape, wood, palm and doum fronds are used as a basic element in the manufacture of home furniture, such as beds, wooden chairs, and *brooches* that are used as rugs for sitting. In addition palm and doum palm leaves

4 Minke *Building with Earth Design and Technology of a Sustainable Architecture,* pp. 11—12.
5 Van Beek and Van Beek, *Glorious Mud!,* p. 135.
6 Hillman, "Traditional Husbandry and Processing of Archaic Cereals in Recent Times," pp. 127—8.
7 Homsher, "Mudbricks and the Process of Construction in the Middle Bronze Age Southern Levant," p. 3.

were used in the manufacture of ropes, shoes, as well as hangers called locally *"mashlēb"* which are used to place food utensils in high areas of the ground and *ṭabag* which are used for the covering food. In the internal homescape of Sudanese houses wood is also used to manufacture what is called "Sahara" which is used to store clothes, decorative items, and other items inside homes. In addition, human clothing is made from materials that come directly or indirectly from plant fibers, and there is much evidence of textiles made from cotton and linen reported from archaeological sites in Sudan. In the process of preparing foods, there are many household tools in which wood and plants are the basic elements in their manufacture, such as what is called *"fundōk"* and *"madakk"* which are used to grinding grains and other food items. Other tools that were used in the homes such as spoons and handles for knives were made from the plants.

There is no doubt that plants are an essential element in the manufacture of equipment and tools in agricultural societies from ancient Sudan. The archaeological record of many sites in Sudan provides much evidence of composite agricultural tools, i.e. wood and plants formed part of them, such as the *shadōf* and the *sāgiya,* which form the basic elements in the manufacture of all parts, as well as other agricultural tools, such as shovels, sickles, rakes, garden hoes, shears, and mattock.

In terms of daily lifestyle, the remains of grains and cereals provided evidence of the types of plants that were used as a part of human foods and drinks. There are two types of plant foods and drinks in Sudan: fermented and unfermented foods, which include bread, porridge, and *kisra,* and drinks such as local wine, *ḥilumurr, ābreh, sharbat* and others.

Area of study

The El Mahas region lies along the Nile, in northern Sudan (Fig.1) beginning at the north end of the Dongola Reach and extending from the area of the villages of Hannek (west bank) and Tombos (east bank), at the top of the Third Cataract, downriver as far as the area of Jebel Dosha (west bank) and Wawa (east bank), in the north. Its northern boundary is most visibly marked by the cliff-face known as Jebel Dosha which overlooks the west bank of the river some five kilometers downstream of Soleb, the end of a long ridge that runs approximately three kilometers into the desert to the west-north-west, forming a prominent natural feature. The region extends over a distance of approximately 141 kilometers (ca. 88 miles) from Hannek to Wawa. Within this area, the landscape is highly varied, including some very fertile localities with abundant alluvial soils

Figure 1.
The area of study.

but also many extremely barren and inhospitable areas (Osman and Edwards 2012: 6-7). The Mahas Archaeological Project, directed by Ali Osman Mohamed Salih, identified four Christian mudbrick sites located in the different three main areas (north, middle, and south) of the El Mahas region in April 2019. I chose these four sites to serve as case studies for the study of mudbrick inclusions in Christian Sudan.

These four sites can be described in brief as follows:

- **Site (1) TMB016 (19°42.935/30°22.72):** This site was located near the north end of Dabaki island on a prominent rock outcrop overlooking the river. Here, the denuded remains of a massively built mudbrick enclosure, measuring approximately 75 x 35 meters, aligned approximately east-west. The only large areas of brickwork which survive are in the western corner towers and in the southeast quadrant where the walls measure over 3.5 meters thick and more than 4 meters high in some places. Perhaps they were elements of a fortified gateway opening to the south. Built on a very irregular surface, parts of the walls have substantial stone foundations, while other parts were built directly onto granite boulders. The builders used large bricks measuring approximately 39 x 20 x 11 centimeters. Within the enclosure, the only surviving structure is a small mudbrick church measuring 16.5 x 10.3 meters, with walls standing up to 2 meters high, constructed on a substantial mudbrick platform. In the southwest corner the lower part of a stairway survives rising over a small vaulted chamber. Most of the surface sherds appear to date to the Christian period (Osman and Edwards 2012) (Fig.2a).
- **Site (2) MAS021 (19°53.012/30°23.575):** The site is a medieval church built amongst large boulders of a small rocky spur running west

from Jebel Barja. This small, well-preserved mudbrick church measures approximately 8.5 x 9.5 meters and in places stands over 4 meters tall. Its east end is built against a massive boulder with rock drawings of a large human figure and two animals. The base of a small central dome survives, and traces of inscribed texts and wall paintings are visible on mud wall plaster. One local name for the site is Hambujneen Kisse (Osman and Edwards 2012) (Fig.2b).

- **Site (3) DFF008 (19°56.932/30°30.138):** The site is situated on a rocky hillock, with modern buildings on lower ground below the hill. It is a well-preserved medieval settlement known by local people as Tinutti. At least five substantial mudbrick structures can be identified. Several rooms still retain their barrel vaulting and parts of the central structure stand nearly 5 meters high. The more fragmentary remains of additional structures, including rougher stone-built buildings, surround these upstanding remains. None of the visible buildings appears to have been a church. Test excavations by the University of Khartoum in Building A, a poorly preserved structure, revealed most of its plan. Excavations also revealed stone foundations beneath the mudbrick superstructure of Building A. Aerial photos from the 1930s show that additional substantial upstanding remains survived on the site at the time (Fig.2c).[8]
- **Site (4) DFF009 (19°56.491/30°30.479):** This site was located on bare rocks on the north side of the thin band of cultivation in an otherwise inhospitable area of Haleeba. The main structure is a small tower-house ("castle-house") with thick stone foundations up to two meters high. Parts of its mudbrick superstructure still survive up to six meters high in its northwest corner. Some traces of its internal vaulted ceilings survive. No clearly defined entrance is visible in the bottom story. Most of the lower rooms were probably accessible only from above. Little surface pottery was found but the little that survived appears to be "Late" and "Terminal Christian" ceramic types. Outside this structure are traces of less substantial structures surviving as a few courses of rough stone walling (Fig.2d).[9]

Materials and Methods

The samples were collected from the mud-brick constructions from the four sites (TMB016, MAS021, DFF008, and DFF009). The total volume of the materials was approximately 4 kilograms (1 kilogram

8 Mohammed, *A Survey of the Third Cataract Region*, p. 55; Osman and Edwards, *The Archaeology of a Nubian Frontier.*

9 Mohammed, *A Survey of the Third Cataract Region*, pp. 53 — 4; Osman and Edwards, *The Archaeology of a Nubian Frontier.*

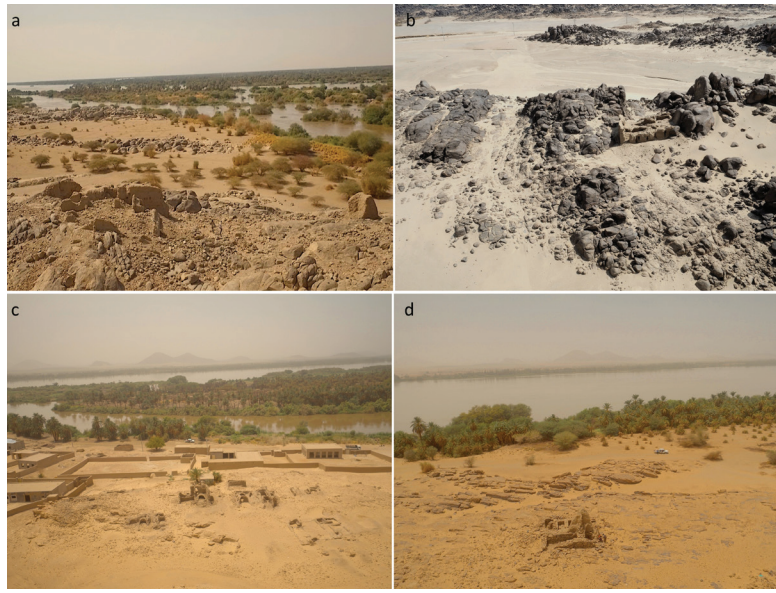

Figure 2.
The four sites discussed in the chapter:
a) TMB016.
b) MAS021.
c) DFF008.
d) DFF009
(photos by Engineer Omer).

from each site). The organic residues of plants and animals could be easily observed in the samples before they floated in the water.

The material was soaked in water for six hours to dissolve the hard mud and to allow the wet sieving to separate the plant's remains that were floated above the mud and sand. Two metal sieves with a mesh size of 0.5 and 1 millimetres were used for the wet sieving to separate the plant remains. The separated material was dried and examined under binoculars in the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, University of Al Neelain (Sudan), and Institute of Archaeology, University of Nicolas Copernicus (Poland). To aid with identification, we used fresh seeds as a reference collection alongside determination literature. Some animal dung and insect remains were separated during the sorting processing of the plant macro-remains.

Results and Discussion

Results of extracted plant remains from the Homescapes

Seven plant species were encountered as seeds. Fruits were extracted and identified from the mudbrick samples. The assemblage of seeds and fruits were preserved by desiccation. Table (1) shows the Latin names of the identified species and their distribution in the sites.

Species	Site (1) TMB016	Site (2) MAS021	Site (3) DFF008	Site (4) DFF009
Triticum aestivum	+	+	+	+
Hordeum vulgare	+	+	+	+
Sorghum bicolor	+	-	-	+
Setaria italica	-	+	-	+
Adansonia digitata	+	+	-	-
Acacia nilotica	-	-	+	-
Cyperus rotundus	+	-	+	+
Acacia sp.? (tree bark)	+	-	-	+
Wild grasses? (Poaceae)	+	+	+	+
Unidentified	+	+	+	+
Animal dung	+	-	+	-
Insects remains	-	-	+	-

Table 1.
Plant species that were identified from the Samples.

Cereals appeared clearly and can be identified from the seeds of:

- **Triticum aestivum** (Fig. 3a), added to some parts of spikelets, chaffs, and glume fragments.
- **Hordeum vulgare** (Fig. 3b), added to some parts of spikelets, chaffs, and glume fragments.
- **Sorghum bicolor** (Fig. 3c), present in spikelet with grain inside.
- **Setaria italica** (Fig. 3d), represented from its seeds.

Furthermore, for the trees:

- **Adansonia digitata** appeared from small fragments of the fruit pulp shell (Fig. 3e).
- **Acacia nilotica** was identified from the seed remains (Fig. 3f).
- **Cyperus rotundus** appeared in the materials from the complete purple nutsedge roots (Fig. 3g).

Some animal remains, animal dung (Fig. 3h), and insect remains (Fig.3i) appeared in the samples. More analyses for more detailed identifications will be done at a later date.

Mudbrick as source of the plant remains

The material from mudbricks is an important source of archaeobotanical and palaeoecological data of the crops, weeds, and other vegetation along the Nile floodplain. The mixture of the plant macro remains in mudbrick is heterogeneous because they came from different origins. These differences originate partly from the clay itself, partly from the plant materials added to the adobe as a

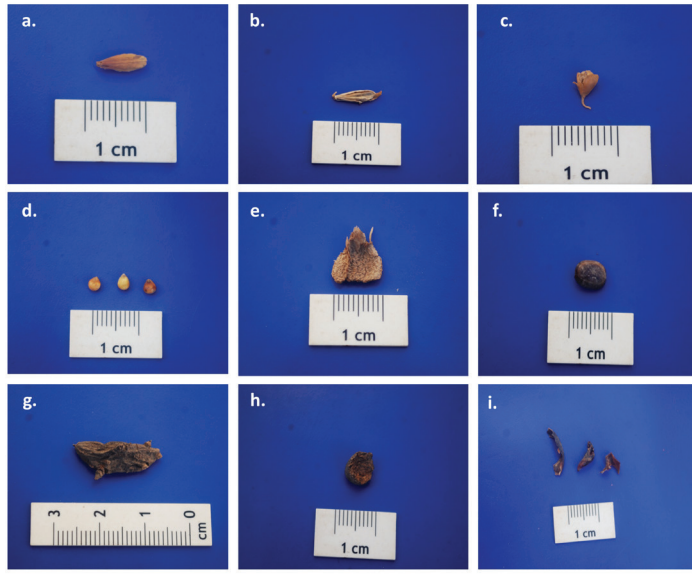

Figure 3. The figure presents the plant and animal remains that were identified: a. Triticum aestivum; b. Hordeum vulgare; c. Sorghum bicolor, d. Setaria italica; e. Adansonia digitata, f. Acacia nilotica; g. Cyperus rotundus; h. Animal dung; i. Insect remains (Photos by the author).

temper, and partly from the vegetation surrounding the site of brick manufacture.[10]

The identified plant species were added to the adobes either as a part of the temper or as an unintentional admixture coming into the mud material during the adobe processing. The fibers serve a number of key functions. First, they hinder cracking upon drying by distributing tension throughout the bulk of the brick. Second, they accelerate drying by improving outward drainage of moisture to the surface of the brick. Third, they significantly reduce the bulk density of the brick,lightening its weight and reducing its thermal conductivity. Most importantly, they increase the tensile strength of the brick, the lack of which is one of the inherent disadvantages of mudbrick.[11] The necessity of temper may vary depending on the quality of the sediment, clay, and organic material that was added to the mudbrick.

Experts in Sudan rarely study the archaeobotanical remains from mudbrick. Sergeev et al. studied the considerable potential of mudbricks as a source of the history, cultural practices, and technologies of ancient societies that developed in a specific natural environment.[12] Their analysis focused on comparing two collections of mudbricks from ancient capital regions of Egypt (Giza) and

10 Pokorná and Beneš, "Plant Macroremains from the Old Kingdom Mudbrick Construction of the Werkaure Tomb."
11 Homsher, "Mudbricks and the Process of Construction in the Middle Bronze Age Southern Levant"; Houben and Guillaud, *Earth Construction*, p. 82.
12 Sergeev et al., "Mudbricks from Giza and Abu Erteila."

Sudan (Abu Erteila). There were significantly different numbers of plant varieties recovered between these two sites. More than 7500 plant macro remains were recovered at Giza and only 430 at Abu Erteila. The difference was pronounced in the concentration of macroremains of cultivated plants which are common at Giza and are very rare in Abu Erteila. In addition, carbonized archaeobotanical materials common in mudbricks from Egypt are practically absent in all the samples from Sudan. Among the possible reasons for the imbalance could be the humble vegetation and a lower intensity of economic activity around Abu Erteila during the Meroitic Period. Alternatively, the Meroitic people may have preferred to use valuable organic waste from the processing of crops in other production spheres such as, for example, animal husbandry.

The evidence from Christian mudbrick from the Third Cataract shows that there is a high density of plant remains. This could be because Christian people in this area preferred to use valuable organic waste from the processing of crops in mudbrick production. This demonstrates that there was a different mudbrick technique used at the Meroitic sites in Central Sudan.

The floral landscape in the Third Cataract during Christian period

Cultivated flora

The archaeobotanical remains from the four Christian mudbrick buildings in El Mahas region show four cultivated plants *Triticum aestivum, Hordeum vulgare, Sorghum bicolor,* and *Setaria italica.* These cereals are packed with starch that contains an appreciable amount of protein. Food production in the Mediterranean basin, Europe, the non-tropical parts of Asia, and (to some extent) the highlands of Ethiopia, was based primarily on wheat and barley.[13] The remains of *Triticum aestivum* and *Hordeum vulgare* were present as grains and spikelets in the mudbrick samples from the four Christian sites. These two plants have been reported at many archaeological sites in Sudan. The analyses of phytoliths and starch grains from human dental calculus of the Early and Middle Neolithic Sudanese cemeteries of Ghaba in the Shendi Reach and at R12 in the Dongola reach in Northern Sudan, provide evidence of wheat and barley. This evidence suggests that these domesticated taxa were introduced into Africa in the early Neolithic. The pillow-like grave deposits provide information about the role of plants in the burial ceremony, at site 8-B-52-A in Sai Island, the site that dates

13 Zohary and Hopf, *Domestications of Plants in the Old World,* p. 13.

to the pre-Kerma period.[14] They were also found at the pharaonic town at Amara West, which dates to 1250-1070 BCE.[15] Remains of *Triticum diococcum* have been reported at the Napatan site HP736 in the Wadi Umm Rahau at the Fourth Nile Cataract, in the Egyptian and Napatan site in Kawa, and from the same period outside the Nile Valley, at Gala Abu Ahmad, located about 110 kilometers west of the river in Wadi Howar, Meroe.[16] These remains have also been found at Christian sites such as Soba (Cartwright 1998; Van der Veen 1991), Nauri (Fuller and Edwards 2001), El Hamra (Madani et al 2015), El Mireibiet (Hamdeen et al 2018), and Banganarti (Hamdeen and Pokorny 2022). This domesticated cereal constitutes the main source of calories for mankind. Cereals thrive in open ground and complete their life cycle in less than a year. The nutritional value of their grains generally is high, and the seeds can be stored for long periods. These two cereals remain common crops in northern Sudan today. They provide important proteins for both people and animals.

Other cereal remains can be found in this material. For example, *Sorghum bicolor* is present in seed form from sites TMB016 and DFF009. This plant is considered one of the world's five most important cereals, but its origins are less well understood than the others (namely rice, wheat, barley, maize).[17] Sorghum is especially important in the semiarid tropics of Africa and South Asia, with significant production also in China, Southeast Asia, and the Americas.[18] There is clear evidence for the use of wild sorghum in the eastern Sahara as early as 6000 BCE and by Neolithic populations in Central Sudan by the fourth millennium BCE.[19] Evidence for the transition from wild sorghum to domesticated sorghum can be sequenced in the stratigraphy of Qasr Ibrim. It suggests that domestication may have been as late as the first centuries CE.[20] Research from Eastern Sudan indicates sorghum was domesticated in the Fourth Millennium BC, based on spikelet morphology from the ceramic impression of the Butana Group (site KG 23) near Khashim el Girba.[21]

14 On the use of plants during the burial ceremony, see Out et al., "Plant Exploitation in Neolithic Sudan"; On the dating of the site, see Geus, "Two Seasons in Sai Island."
15 Ryan et al., "Archaeobotanical Research in a Pharaonic Town in Ancient Nubia."
16 On the Napatan site HP736 in the Wadi Umm Rahau at the Fourth Nile Cataract, see Badura, "Plant Remains from the Napatan Settlement in Wadi Umm-Rahau." On the Egyptian and Napatan site in Kawa, see Fuller, "Early Kushite Agriculture." On Gala Abu Ahmed, see Kahlheber, "Archaeobotanical Investigations at the Gala Abu Ahmed Fortress in Lower Wadi Howar, Northern Sudan." On Meroe, see Shinnie and Anderson, *The Capital of Kush 2*, p. 366.
17 Fuller et al., 2014.
18 Doggett, *Sorghum;* Hulse et al., *Sorghum and Millets;* Snowden, *The Cultivated Races of Sorghum.*
19 On the Eastern Sahara, see Wasylikowa et al, 1999. On Central Sudan, see Stemler, "A Scanning Electron Microscopic Analysis of Plant Impressions in Pottery."
20 Rowley-Conwy, "Sorghum from Qasr Ibrim"; Rowley-Conwy et al., "Ancient DNA from Archaeological Sorghum (Sorghum bicolour) from Qasr Ibrim."
21 Winchell et al., "Evidence for Sorghum Domestication in Fourth Millennium BC Eastern Sudan."

The last species of cereal type, *Setaria italica,* was reported as seeds from two sites, MAS021 and DFF009. One of the pieces of evidence in the area for this *Setaria* species was recovered from the settlement contexts at site known as Abu Darbien, which is located in Central Sudan and dates to 7860 cal. BP.[22] In the Eastern Sudan from sites K1 I 5, S14D, 3-S5 dated to Gash group 1500-1400 BCE. *Setaria* species was identified on the exterior surface of pottery and not far from that site. *Setaria* species also was recorded from site SEG 42 R 5 and dating to Hagiz Group 500 BCE-500 CE.[23] Some remains of *Setaria* species have been identified also in the organic residues in pots from early Meroitic cemetery at Amir Abdallah.[24] *Setaria italica* remains appeared together with a related wild weedy grass identified as *Setaria cf. sphaceleata* at the Christian site at Nauri on the opposite bank of the site DF009.[25] This evidence suggests that *Setaria* species is common in this area of Sudan and that there may be some connection between these two sites during Christian period.

The evidence of domesticated plants from our sites in the Third Cataract provided a strong indication of the agricultural production of these crops during the Early, Classic, and Late Christian period. The evidence of Nubia therefore suggests that the original agriculture in Nubia focused on winter cultivation based on receding Nile floods. The summer season of low flood would not have been conducive to cultivation without irrigation, except over very limited land areas or of very tolerant crops.[26] But all this was changed when the *sāgiya* was introduced to Sudan during the Meroitic period.[27] More land was made available and more crops could be produced. This development has important implications for the potential density of the population, as more land will require more labor, and two seasons "winter and summer" of cultivation will tie laborers to the land for a greater proportion of the year, thus potentially removing some of their ability to be part-time specialists during the non-agricultural seasons as potters.[28] This was confirmed by the high density of pottery sherds, kilns, and several houses noted and documented on the Christian sites in the Third Cataract and Dongola region.

The evidence of these cereals from the mud-building sites in the Third Cataract indicates that these plants played a major role in the economy and foods for humans and animals during the Christian

22 Magid, "Exploitation of Plants in the Eastern Sahel (Sudan)."
23 Beldados, "Millets in Eastern Sudan," pp. 507, 509.
24 Fernandez, *La Cultura Alto-Meroitica del Norte de Nubia.*
25 Fuller and Edwards, "Medieval Plant Economy in Middle Nubia."
26 Fuller, "The Economic Basis of the Qustul Splinter State."
27 Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to African;* Trigger, *History and Settlement in Lower Nubia.*
28 Fuller, "The Economic Basis of the Qustul Splinter State."

period (6th to the 16th centuries CE) in the Third Cataract region and in Northern Sudan. This suggestion can be confirmed by historical texts dating to this same period and other plant remains from Christian sites in Northern and Central Sudan.[29]

Riverine wild flora

The material under discussion also contained wild plant species, a few of which have medical and ethnographic value. These plants were probably collected by or available for this purpose to people living in the Christian settlements in the Third Cataract region. One of these riverine wild floras is *Cyperus rotundus*, a type of grass that appeared from the complete purple nutsedge roots from site TMB016, DFF008 and DFF009. This species has been in association with humans from remote pre-history to the present. It was consumed as a food for thousands of years in prehistoric times, but is viewed as a troublesome weed in modern times. Abundant remains of *C. rotundus* tuber, thought to have been collected as food, were found at the 18,000-year-old site of Wadi Kubbaniya, near Aswan, Egypt, and at later sites at Al Khiday, 25 kilometers south of Omdurman.[30] The complex of burial sites has yielded dental calculus samples from pre-Mesolithic, Mesolithic Neolithic, and Late Meroitic ages, covering more than 7000 years. Cyperaceae tuber was recorded from the Kushite site at Kawa dating back to the Napatan period (750-400 BCE).[31]

Ecologically, *Cyperus rotundus* is commonly found in cultivated areas, disturbed areas, roadsides, lawns, parks, and wastelands, and is favored by moist, fertile soil conditions, and a warm climate.[32] Moisture and temperature are reported to be the most important factors in restricting its possible distribution in agroecosystems.[33] Plants of *C. rotundus* continuously produce new tubers and successive plants until the occurrence of frost over winter, which burns the leaves and causes the tubers to enter into a state of dormancy. *Cyperus rotundus* tubers are sensitive to saline conditions, low temperatures, and shade.[34] The extraction of chemical compounds and microfossils from dental calculus derived from prehistoric skeletons from the site of Al Khiday indicates that the tubers of *C. rotundus* were used as food and may have served as a carbohydrate staple for millennia. The evidence of this plant in the Third Cataract indicates that the plants

29 On the historical texts, see Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia.*
30 Wadi Kubbaniya, near Aswan, Egypt, see Hardy and Kubiak-Martens, *Wild Harvest.*
31 On the complex of burial sites, see Buckley et al., "Dental Calculus." On Kawa, see Fuller, "Early Kushite Agriculture," p. 71.
32 Auld and Medd 1987; Parsons and Cuthbertson 2001.
33 Bendixen and Nandihalli, "Worldwide Distribution of Purple and Yellow Nutsedge."
34 Gunasekera and Fernando, "Agricultural Importance, Biology, Control and Utilization Cyperus rotundus."

may have been used as food or a part of local traditional perfume made by a woman in Sudan called *(khunfur)*.[35]

Large deposits belong to glumes of wild grasses (family: *Poaceae*) were presented in the samples from the four sites, but the species remains unidentified. Generally, grasses have a high nutritional value, and they have been collected for animal fodder or a part of the clay and probably mixed with clay during the production of the mudbrick.

Wild trees

The remains of *Adansonia digitate* appear from small fragments of the fruit pulp in sites TMB 016 and MAS 021. The ecological conditions of this plant lead it to mainly grow in the hot and dry savanna areas of sub-Saharan Africa. The plant is very effective in preventing water loss and can flourish in sandy soils. In East Africa, the trees grow in the shrublands and coastal areas. *Adansonia digitata* is a traditional food plant in East and sub-Saharan Africa. It has a rich medicinal and nutritional value, this species was indigenous to West Africa and brought to Eastern Africa by a movement of pastoralists.[36] In the arid and semi-arid areas of sub-Saharan Africa, the *Adansonia digitata* provides a variety of foodstuffs to local communities, as well as fodder, fibers for weaving and rope-making, gum, seed oil, natural medicine, materials for dishes, and water storage.[37] It can also be used for shelter and as a gathering point for humans and their livestock.[38] All across the African continent, the sight of *Adansonia digitata* has inspired tales, poetry, songs, and legends. *Adansonia digitata* have often commanded compassion and even devotion.[39]

The earliest archaeobotanical record from Sudan and northeast Africa for this species came from site K1 IX in Kassala and dates to the Late Gash Group context. This evidence was the charred seeds of *Adansonia digitata.* These findings suggest that this tree had already

35 Buckley et al., "Dental Calculus"; Hamdeen, "Preliminary Observation on the Plant Remains."

36 On the medicinal and nutritional values, see Andrews, *The Flowering Plants of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan;* Mabberley, *A Portable Dictionary of Plants.* On importation by pastorialists, see Pock Tsy et al., "Chloroplast DNA Phylogeography."

37 On foodstuffs to local communities, see Van Wyk, *Food Plants of the World;* Kabore et al., "A Review of Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) Products." On fodder, see Venter and Venter, *Making the Most of Indigenous Trees;* De Caluwe, *Market Chain Analysis of Baobab;* Bekele-Tesemma, *Useful Trees and Shrubs of Ethiopia.* On fibers for weaving and rope-making, see Teel and Hirst, *A pocket directory of trees and seeds in Kenya.* On gum, see Roberts, *Indigenous healing plants;* Nussinovitch, *Plant Gum Exudates of the World.* On seed oil, see Osman, "Chemical and Nutrient Analysis of Baobab"; Kamatou et al., "An Updated Review of Adansonia Digitata." On natural medicine, see Mueller and Mechler, *Medicinal Plants in Tropical Countries;* Iwu, *Handbook of African Medicinal Plants;* Lim, *Edible Medicinal and Non-Medicinal Plants.* On materials for dishes, see Schütt and Wolf, "Adansonia Digitata." On water storage, see Walsh, "Climate, Hydrology, and Water Resources."

38 Gebauer and Ebert, "Tropische Wildobstarten."

39 Buthelezi, *Baobab;* Wenkel, *Im Schatten des Baobabs.*

been transferred from west to east across the savanna by the early second millennium BCE.[40] The evidence from the Third Cataract is considered the second record for this species in the Sudan and North-East Africa dating back to the early Christian period (sixth century CE).

The *Acacia nilotica* belongs to the family Fabaceae. It is a widely spread tree in the central and northern parts of the Sudan, known in Sudanese folk medicine as *kārad.*[41] The species of Acacia is found all over the world distributed in dry tropical and sub-tropical regions. In Sudanese folk medicine, the fruits (pods) of *Acacia nilotica* are used as aqueous macerates or in a powder form for the treatment of pneumonia, tonsillitis, dysentery, diarrhea, and malaria.[42] The phytochemical studies on the pods of *Acacia nilotica* showed some bioactive principles such as tannins, saponins, glycosides, and flavonoids.[43] Some studies showed that the pods of *Acacia nilotica* have potential antioxidants and are found effective in protecting plasmid DNA and human serum albumin protein oxidation induced by hydroxyl radicals.[44] It can be also used as fodder for livestock in the dry lands of Sudan.[45] The *Acacia sp*. remains were recorded from many archaeological sites in this region such as at Kawa, Nauri, and Banganarti.[46] In the samples from the study area the evidence of *Acacia nilotica* is represented on the form of seeds. Some tree bark probably related to *Acacia sp.* were also reported. This plant had medical uses in Sudan, but the archaeological evidence for plants employed for medicinal purposes in Sudan is not clear. However, physical anthropological analysis of human bones shows many diseases during the Christian period, and according to ethnobotanical and laboratory studies, some of these diseases could be cured by certain plant species.[47] Depending on the field observation, it is likely that this plant was used for the medical value, animal fodder, fire fuel and using for building houses and animal stockyard in the Third Cataract region.

Lastly, the archaeobotanical evidence from the Christian mudbrick sites in the El Mahas region provided some evidence of the flora landscape. t can be divided into three types: riverine wild flora, cultivated flora, and wild trees. It offers also a new

40 Beldados, "Millets in Eastern Sudan."
41 Abd-El-Nabi et al., "Antimicrobial Activity of *Acacia nilotica*."
42 Ebrahim et al., "Study on Selected Trace Elements and Heavy Metals in Some Popular Medicinal Plants from Sudan."
43 Auwal et al., "Antibacterial Properties."
44 Singh et al., "Antioxidant and Anti-Quorum Sensing Activities."
45 Abdalla et al., "Fodder Potential."
46 On Kawa, see Fuller, "Early Kushite Agriculture," p. 71. On Nauri, see Fuller and Edwards, "Medieval Plant Economy in Middle Nubia," p. 99. On Banganarti, see Hamdeen and Pokorny, "Plant Impressions," p. 208.
47 Hamdeen and Pokorny, "Plant Impressions."

perspective for applying the technique of extorted plants remains from mudbrick in Sudan and how the characteristics of mudbrick offer good conditions for preserving organic remains. Some of the plant remains are still undetermined, including some fragments of branches, charcoal, and wood. Further palynological, carpological, and xylological analyses studies in the future should provide a new data relating to the domestication and natural vegetation of the area.

Conclusions

The plant remains that were reported from the four Christian sites in the Third Cataract region provide to us some information about the homescape and landscape of this area. Evidences of *Triticum aestivum, Hordeum vulgare, Sorghum bicolor,* and *Setaria italica* show that they were probably used as some of the primary sources of foodstuff for human and animal populations during the Christian period. Many cereals, legumes, roots and tubers, fruits, nuts, and leaves belonging to those species provided valuable and fundamental diets for consumption to human foods and fodder for animals.

Our plant remains provided some evidence of the external and internal homescape of the Third Cataract during the Christian period. *Acacia* species and *Adansonia* species could be used as building materials in both the exterior and interior shelters and homes. Some of these materials are wood, timber, and straw, as well as hard trunks and tree branches probably used as roofs and walls in the houses. Furniture was commonly composed of *Acacia* woods.

From ancient times till nowadays, people used traditional herbal medicines to treat their ailments; particularly in our materials *Acacia nilotica* was presented and probably used for medical purposes. The remains of the *Adansonia digitata* from the Third Cataract was probably used in a variety of ways during the Christian period for water storage, medical needs, and shelter as well. Today Sudanese women employ *Cyperus rotundus* for cosmetic and perfumery purposes, and it may have been used during the Christian period also.

There are three flora landscapes in the area of study based on our plant remains, cultivated flora which include the four cereals; *Triticum aestivum, Hordeum vulgare, Sorghum bicolor,* and *Setaria italica.* Riverine wild flora which can noted clearly form the remains of *Cyperus rotundus* and some wild grasses, and lastly *Acacia nilotica and Adansonia digitata,* which can be considered as two models representing wild trees in the Third Cataract region during the Christian period.

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A Bioarchaeological Approach to Everyday Life: Squatting Facets at Abu Fatima

Sarah Schrader

Everyday life in Nubia involves activities such as cooking, cleaning, planting seeds, harvesting crops, watching a football match, chatting with friends, monitoring children, eating delicious foods, and drinking tea. If we conjure up images of these quotidian actions from personal experiences, many of these activities are performed in a squatting position (Fig. 1). When a chair or mat is not available, modern Nubians will frequently assume a squatting position, with hips, knees, and ankles bent, to create temporary respite. As many of us that are not commonly in this position can attest to, it requires a degree of flexibility that no doubt comes with years of habituation and practice.

Using bioarchaeological methods, we are able to assess whether or not ancient populations also frequently assumed a squatting position. The lower leg bone (tibia) has been shown to possess accessory articulating facets when the ankle joint is regularly hyperdorsiflexed (i.e., when toes are drawn towards shins; Fig. 1). There have been a few bioarchaeological publications using this approach, however, they are mainly limited to case studies.[1] I argue that the squatting facets method has broader theoretical importance as it can be used as an indicator of everyday life in the *longue durée*. We have a window into how people spent their days, inside and outside of the home, and potentially a temporal line of continuity between ancient and modern populations.[2]

1 Ari, Oygucu, and Sendemir, "The Squatting Facets on the Tibia of Byzantine (13th) Skeletons"; Boulle, "Osteological Features Associatd with Ankle Hyperdorsiflexion"; Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Suatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa"; Molleson, "Seed Preparation in the Mesolithic"; Molleson, "Bones of Work at the Origins of Labour"; Robb, "Skeletal Signs of Activity in the Italian Metal Ages"; Trinkaus, "Squatting among the Neandertals."

2 Trinkaus, "Squatting among the Neandertals," p. 330.

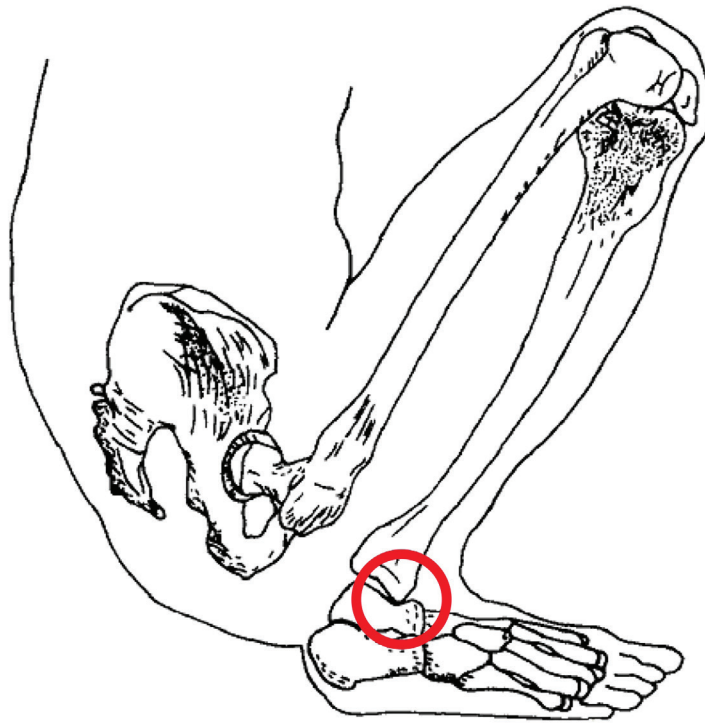

Figure 1. Squatting Position and Skeletal Consequences of Habitual Squatting (modified from Trinkaus 1975)

Bioarchaeology of the Everyday

Everyday life is vitally important to the development of individual and communal identities as well as to agentive action and social change. While certain major life events (e.g., wedding, funeral, war, etc.) may create a more marked memory, the majority of lived experiences are those that we might consider mundane. It is these minutiae that scholars of practice theory suggest are the most crucial—these everyday actions can be minor acts of resistance to an overarching social system that, with enough support and continuity, can go on to change entire social structures.[3] In this way, these everyday lives of everyday people are anything but mundane, but rather consist of a series of critical ways of operating.[4]

Archaeologists have long argued that understanding everyday life in the past is essential. Moving away from temples and tombs, archaeologists became interested in how everyday people lived in their day-to-day milieu. Additionally, archaeology is ideally situated

3 Bourdieu, *Outline of the Theory of Practice;* Giddens, *The Constitution of Society;* Schatzki, "Materiality and Social Life."

4 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life.*

to study this everyday past given the material record that everyday life creates. Interpretations of everyday practice have been achieved through studies of midden deposits, architecture, debitage, landscape modification, and ceramics. Footprints at the ancient Mayan site of Chan Nòohol were even used to recreate movements and personal interactions within this community.[5] The archaeology of everyday life in ancient Nubia has been examined through several lenses, including, but not limited to architecture and use of space, foodways, and identity expression.[6]

Skeletal data has the ability to provide unique insight into everyday life in the ancient world. Contrary to popular belief, bones are not as unmalleable as we might assume. Rather, the skeletal frame adapts throughout one's life, slowly remodeling on a cellular level. It is estimated that it takes approximately 10 years for the skeleton to completely remodel.[7] This process also facilitates a record of life events, embodied in the bones themselves. This is frequently referred to as embodiment theory in bioarchaeology and speaks to the biosocial nature of bioarchaeology.[8] The discipline goes beyond looking at broken bones or diseases to assessing lived experience in the ancient past, how it changed during periods of political, economic, and social upheaval, and how these data can be used to inform our understanding of our modern world.

In previous work I have used this embodiment framework to examine everyday life in ancient Nubia.[9] By examining skeletal indicators of activity (osteoarthritis and muscle attachment sites) as well as biomolecular approaches to diet (carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis), I was able to document how everyday life changed for Nubians living under colonial New Kingdom rule as well as in a post-colonial and Napatan landscape. By integrating a theoretical framework grounded in practice theory into bioarchaeological data, I was able to interpret relatively subtle diachronic changes in activity and diet as acts of agency and resistance. For example, bioarchaeological activity markers indicate that the post-colonial Third-Intermediate and Napatan period population may have indeed been engaging in more physically strenuous everyday movements than New Kingdom colonial Egypto-Nubian populations (at the site

5 Robin, *Everyday Life Matters: Maya Farmers at Chan.*
6 Agha, "Nubia Still Exists"; Budka and Doyen, "Life in New Kindom Towns in Upper Nubia"; Haaland, "Changing Food Ways as Indicators of Emerging Complexity in Sudanese Nubia"; Smith, "Pharoahs, Feasts, and Foreigners"; Smith, *Wretched Kush;* Smith, "A Potter's Wheelhead from Askut and the Organization of the Egyptian Ceramic Industry in Nubia"; Smith, "The Nubian Experience of Egyptian Domination during the New Kingdom"; van Peltt, "Revising Egypto-Nubian Relations in New Kingdom Lower Nubia"; Spencer, Stevens, and Binder, *Nubia in the New Kingdom.*
7 Hedges et al., "Collagen Turnover in the Adult Femoral Mid-Shaft."
8 Schrader and Torres-Rouff, "Embodying Bioarchaeology."
9 Schrader, *Activity, Diet and Social Practice.*

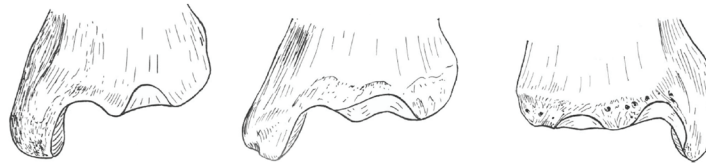

Figure 2. Images of Different Types of Squatting Facets on Distal Tibiae (modified from Singh 1959).

of Tombos, Third Cataract). However, this need not be interpreted as something negative, but rather can be framed as a newly independent community utilizing local raw materials (e.g., quarrying, mining) and building new communities and connections (e.g., construction efforts; new trading partners and political allies).[10]

Squatting Facets[11]

As discussed above, squatting facets are an articulation between the shin bone (distal tibia) and foot (talus) that are thought to be acquired in life. When an individual squats down for extended periods of time, the two bones begin to touch, where in a normal anatomical position, they would not. This creates a new joint, or articulation, and is an example of how the skeleton can adapt during life (Fig. 2). Note that changes can also be seen on the femur, patella, talus, and metatarsals, however, most commonly the distal tibia is affected and studied.[12]

Squatting facets have been studied for decades both from a clinical and bioarchaeological perspective. Clinicians have examined the prevalence of squatting facets in modern populations as well as associated the presence of squatting facets with the potential for subsequent injury.[13] Several papers have reported the presence of squatting facets both in adults as well as fetuses. The interest in fetal squatting facets stems from the question: are squatting facets the product of activity, acquired through one's life? In which case we would expect to find them only on adult remains. Or are squatting facets inherited? In which case we would find them on both adults and fetuses. Furthermore, does the frequency of squatting facets vary across genetically heterogeneous populations? Singh, for example, compares adult and fetal squatting facets prevalence in an Indian population and notes that, while adults do have higher frequencies, fetuses do indeed possess squatting facets.[14] Singh does state that the presence of squatting facets in fetuses is low

10 Schrader and Buzon, "Everyday Life after Collapse."
11 Singh, "Squatting Facets on the Talus and Tibia in Indians," p. 545.
12 Boulle, "Osteological Features Associatd with Ankle Hyperdorsiflexion"; Molleson, "Seed Preparation in the Mesolithic."
13 Massada, "Ankle Overuse Injuries in Soccer Players."
14 Singh, "Squatting Facets on the Talus and Tibia in Indian Foetuses."

in this sample, it is also variable between other samples published in previous works (22.6% Indian; 23% European; 3.1% Japanese). Barnett, however, provides an explanation for these findings. He argues that these traits can indeed be inherited, however, if the activities that maintain this articulation (i.e., squatting) are not maintained throughout the lifecourse, they will become obliterated as bone turnover occurs.[15] While this explanation does explain the presence of squatting facets on both fetal and adult remains, the matter is still a topic of debate today.

Bioarchaeological studies have contributed to this research by looking at changes in squatting facets frequency through time as well as sexual division of labor in the past. Squatting facets have been found in early hominin remains, including Neanderthals.[16] Broadly speaking, we see a decrease in squatting facets through time, and a notable decrease during the medieval period. Boule examined 543 tibiae from French and American archaeological sites (1st-20th centuries CE), and found that prior to the Middle Ages, squatting was quite common; however, with the dawn of the Middle Ages, there was a steady decrease in the frequency of squatting facets.[17] Similarly, Dlamini and Morris found that squatting facets were common in Late Stone Age (1st millennium BCE) South Africa, but almost nonexistent in comparative modern skeletal and cadaver samples.[18] Molleson reports high incidence of squatting facets at Abu Hureyra, Syria (Mesolithic/Neolithic) and Çatalhöyük, Turkey (Neolithic) and suggests that a saddle quern or mortar were used to process the grains that were being harvested.[19] Molleson also suggests the potential sexual division of labor, indicating that women and girls may have been responsible for preparing foodstuffs, whereas men and boys, who exhibited higher rates of squatting facets, were likely working with their hands while squatting, possibly making baskets and preparing cord.[20]

Squatting Facets in Nubia

To my knowledge squatting facets have not been systematically studied in Nubian remains. Here I present squatting facets data from the Kerma, or Kushite, period site of Abu Fatima (*ca.* 2500-1500 BCE). Abu Fatima is located near the Third Cataract of the Nile near Tombos and modern day Kerma (Fig. 3) and is currently

15 Barnett, "Squatting Facets on the European Talus."
16 Trinkaus, "Squatting among the Neandertals."
17 Boulle, "Evolution of Two Human Skeletal Markers of the Squatting Position."
18 Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Squatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa."
19 Molleson, "Seed Preparation in the Mesolithic."
20 Molleson, "Bones of Work at the Origins of Labour."

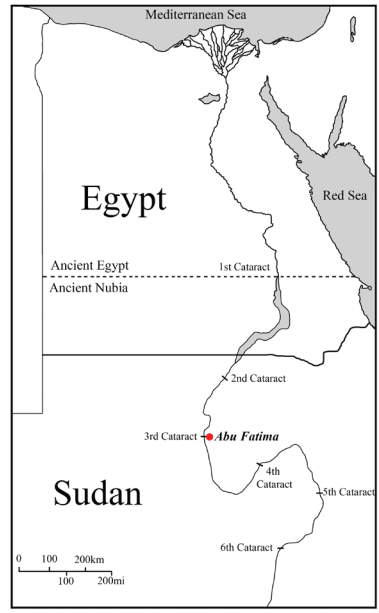

Figure 3. Map of Abu Fatima.

being excavated by Dr. Stuart Tyson Smith (University California, Santa Barbara) and myself. Given its location and size, it has been proposed that Abu Fatima was a suburban community, which would have been a long walk (approximately 10km) to the ancient capital city Kerma.[21] The community is thought to have participated in agricultural and animal husbandry practices, but also may have produced pottery, constructed homes, and manufactured other trade goods.

Analysis of squatting facets was conducted according to presence or absence of the trait.[22] All available adult skeletons from Abu Fatima were analyzed. In some cases, no tibiae were preserved, for which squatting facets could not be assessed. In other instances, only one tibia (left or right) was preserved and, thus, only one data point was collected for said individual(s). Analysis of sex and age-at-death were performed according to accepted bioarchaeological standards.[23]

The ethics of handling and studying human skeletal remains were taken into consideration at all stages of this research, including excavation, curation, and analysis.[24] The project worked closely with the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums (NCAM)

21 Schrader and Smith, "Socializing Violence."
22 Mann, Hunt, and Lozanoff, *Photographic Regional Atlas of Non-Metric Traits and Anatomical Variants in the Human Skeleton.*
23 Buikstra and Ubelaker, *Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains.*
24 Schrader et al., "Decolonizing Bioarchaeology in Sudan."

of Sudan as well as the local community of Abu Fatima, who were both supportive of this research. This analysis was non-destructive, so the remains were macroscopically analyzed and then returned to conservator boxes in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment at the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, The Netherlands.

Did Ancient Nubians Squat?

A total of 21 individuals from the Abu Fatima collection had at least one preserved distal tibia (Table 1). Of these, only one individual did not possess squatting facets (Burial 4E1). The vast majority of the Abu Fatima population (20/21, or 95%) did have the very clear presence of squatting facets. This is markedly higher than many previously published comparative studies (Table 2). Note that this list is limited to those studies that focus on tibial squatting facets, as opposed to femoral, patellar, tarsal, or metatarsal facets.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Squatting Facets at Abu Fatima.

ID #	Squatting Facet Presence		Sex	Age-at-Death	Locality
	Left	Right			
1A1	✓	✓	Male	35-49	Local
1B1	✓	✓	Female	50+	Local
1E1	✓	✓	Female	18-34	Local
1F1	✓	✓	Male	35-49	Local
1F2	✓	✓	Male	35-49	Local
2A1	✓	✓	Female	35-49	Non-local
2A2	✓	✓	Male	35-49	Local
2B1	✓	✓	Male	35-49	Local
2C1	✓	✓	Male	18-34	Non-local
2D1	✓	✓	Female	50+	Local
2F1	n/o	✓	Female	35-49	Local
3A1	n/o	✓	Male	35-49	Local
4A1	✓	✓	Male	18-34	Local
4B2	n/o	✓	Female	35-49	Unknown
4C1	✓	n/o	Female	50+	Local
4D1	n/o	✓	Female	35-49	Non-local
4E1	-	-	Probable Male	35-49	Local
5B1	✓	✓	Female	18-34	Local
8A2	✓	✓	Female	50+	Non-local
8B1	✓	✓	Female	35-49	Local
9A1	✓	✓	Male	35-49	Non-local

Table 2. Frequency of Squatting Facets in Other Populations

Population	Squatting Facet Presence	Sample Size	Citation
Abu Fatima	95%	21	Present study
Ancient Egypt	96%	300	Satinoff, "Study of the Squatting Facets of the Talus and Tibia in Ancient Egyptians
Ancient Egypt	33%	3	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Byzantine (13th century CE)	48%	100	Ari et al., "The Squatting Facets on the Tibia of Byzantine (13th) Skeletons"
Late Stone Age (1st millennium BCE), South Africa	50%	56	Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Suatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa"
Early farming (5th-19th centuries CE), South Africa	77%	17	Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Suatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa"
18th century Cape Town	5%	21	Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Suatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa"
20th century Cape Town cadavers	0%	29	Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Suatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa"

Table 2 contd.

South African (Oxford/Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	27%	11	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Neanderthals (Europe, Near East)	91%	11	Trinkaus, "Squatting among the Neandertals: A Problem in the Behavioral Interpretation of Skeletal Morphology"
European (Oxford/ Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	13%	40	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Scottish (Anatomical Department, University of Edinburgh)	17%	118	Wood, "The Tibia of the Australian Aborigine"
Asian (Oxford/Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	48%	23	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Native American (Oxford/Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	37%	19	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Polynesia (Oxford/ Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	75%	4	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Melanesia (Oxford/ Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	71%	38	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"

Table 2 contd.

Australian (Oxford/ Royal College of Surgeons' Museum)	79%	14	Thomson et al., "The Influence of Posture on the Form of the Articular Surfaces of the Tibia and Astragalus in the Different Races of Man and the Higher Apes"
Australian (Collection of Anatomical Museum of the University of Edinburgh)	81%	236	Wood, "The Tibia of the Australian Aborigine"
Indian (20th century) cadavers and "museum specimens"	77%	292	Singh, "Squatting Facets on the Talus and Tibia in Indians"
Panjabi, Indian	87%	52	"The Influence of Function, as Exemplified in the Morphology of the Lower Extremity of the Panjabi"

One interpretation of these data is that the people of ancient Kush, just like modern Nubians, spent much of their everyday life in a squatting position. This may have involved both occupational as well as leisure activities. It is also interesting that both males and females exhibit squatting facets, suggesting both sexes were usingthis position. All adult age categories, young, middle, and old adults, also possess evidence for squatting. This suggests that the activity was continued throughout life; if, for example, an individual was a squatter in childhood or young adulthood but then stopped, the facet would be obliterated by bone remodeling as they aged. In short, it would appear that a large portion of the Abu Fatima community, of both sexes and all age groups, were spending much of their everyday life in a squatting position.

It is also interesting to note that previous bioarchaeological research of the Abu Fatima collection indicates that approximately 25% of this population were of non-local origin, meaning they migrated from someplace else and eventually died and were buried at Abu Fatima.[25] This was assessed via strontium isotope analysis, which compares strontium values from dental enamel (produced during childhood) to local geology; if these values are similar, we can deduce that the individual was local to the region, however, if these values differ, it is possible that they migrated into this community. Interestingly, all non-local individuals also possessed squatting

25 Schrader et al., "Intraregional 87Sr/86Sr Variation in Nubia."

Figure 4. Statuette of Squatting Man (Old Kingdom, Dynasty 6; Image ©National Museums Scotland A.1954.10) https://www.nms.ac.uk/search-our-collections/collection-search-results?entry=300275 (last accessed November 27, 2024).

facets. This suggests that the patterns exhibited here at Abu Fatima, may not be limited to just this community, but rather may be a more pan-Nubian pattern. Using strontium isotope analysis, it is impossible to pinpoint the point of origin for an individual, so we cannot say where these non-locals came from. But it does appear that throughout their life they were habitually participating in a squatting behavior.

The one individual in the Abu Fatima collection that did not possess squatting facets (4E1) is a bit of an oddity. This was a probable male, dating to the Ancient Kerma period (2,500-2,050 BCE), who likely died between 35-50 years of age. The grave was looted in antiquity and was quite disturbed, with no skeletal elements remaining *in situ*. Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that this individual may have originally been buried with numerous and varied grave goods. Three lithic blades forming a Nubian-style arrowhead, rawhide sandals, faience beads, and intricate leatherwork and basketry were all found in this burial pit. Although it is difficult to say with any certainty given the looting, it is possible this grave could have belonged to an elite individual or an individual of a special class (e.g., occupation). For example, if individual 4E1 were elite, perhaps they didn't squat, but rather sat in chairs. If they were not participating in common tasks because of their status, they could have found other positions of relaxation. Another possible explanation is that this person had an occupation (e.g., warrior), or daily life, that did not require squatting. It could also be as simple as this individual

Figure 5. Statuette of Woman Grinding Grain (Old Kingdom, Dynasty 5 Image © Boston Museum of Fine Arts 21.2601) https://collections.mfa.org/objects/144023 (last accessed November 27, 2024).

did not enjoy squatting or perhaps an injury, unidentifiable in the skeletal remains, prevented them from assuming this position.

If we turn to archaeological evidence for squatting in the Nile Valley, there are a few examples. It is interesting to note that most of these samples are associated with the non-elite, working class. For example, there is an Old Kingdom (probably 6th Dynasty, *ca* 2,345-2,125 BCE) pottery statuette of a squatting man who appears to be naked and emaciated (Fig. 4). There is a similar figure, on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, of an emaciated old squatting man grasping an ivory staff. There are also multiple examples of figures grinding grain, like a statuette from the 5th Dynasty (*ca.* 2,465-2,323 BCE; Giza; Fig. 5). Figures such as these exhibit scenes from everyday life and were thought to provide resources for deceased in the afterlife. They can also provide some insight into the types of activities Nile Valley inhabitants may have done while in a squatting position.

In other squatting facets studies, bioarchaeologists have concluded that individuals with squatting facets may have regularly participated in grinding, basketmaking, spinning, weaving, baking, milking animals, preparing dung, knitting rugs, sitting around

a fire, and working in the fields.[26] There is also some evidence within Egypt to suggest that scribes may have frequently taken a squatting position.[27] Archaeological evidence in Nubia indicates that percussion instruments were used in a squatting position.[28] Lastly, there are many iconographic examples from Ancient Egypt of women giving birth in a squatting position.[29] However, for the skeleton to modify it would need to be a highly repetitive behavior. It is certainly possible that childbirth contributed to the development of squatting facets, it was probably in combination with other activities.

Satinoff conducted a study of squatting facets in an Egyptian sample.[30] The origins of the skeletal material remain unclear as the only documentation provided is that they were housed at the Institute of Anthropology at the University of Turin; however, no chronological or spatial information was provided. Satinoff found that of the 300 male and female remains analyzed 96% did in fact have squatting facets. This is very much congruent with the findings presented here from Abu Fatima. It does beg the question about genetic predisposition to said facets, given the relatively genetic homogeneity between Egyptians and Nubians. Skeletal analysis of additional samples, with well-documented chronologies and cemetery locations, would be useful to better understand if the majority of Egyptians and Nubians had squatting facets, or if the similar values between Abu Fatima and the results presented by Satinoff are a coincidence. Additionally, skeletal analysis of non-adult remains, particularly neonates and infants, could be used to address the genetic predisposition theory.

Conclusions

These data provide a novel perspective on everyday life in ancient Nubia. Up until now, the Nubian quotidian had been examined via built space, everyday life objects, refuse, as well as skeletal indicators of physically strenuous activity and dietary practices. This study presents a unique line of embodied continuity between the ancient Kushites, inhabiting the Third Cataract region *ca.* 4,000 years ago and the Nubians that inhabit the region today. While it is impossible to specify what activities these individuals were engaging while

26 Baykara et al., "Squatting Facet"; Dlamini and Morris, "An Investigation of the Frequency of Squatting Facets in Later Stone Age Foragers from South Africa"; Molleson, "Bones of Work at the Origins of Labour."
27 Casson, *Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt*.
28 Kleinitz, "Soundscapes of the Nubian Nile Valley."
29 Haimov-Kochman, Sciaky-Tamir, and Hurwitz, "Reproduction Concepts and Practices in Ancient Egypt Mirrored by Modern Medicine."
30 Satinoff, "Study of the Squatting Facets of the Talus and Tibia in Ancient Egyptians."

assuming the squatting posture, these data suggest that both men and women were regularly squatting at Abu Fatima during the Kushite period. As Abu Fatima is considered a suburban space, these interpretations are further evidence for how the ordinary, non-elite population would have lived their daily lives, both inside and outside of the home. This may have involved squatting around a fire, preparing food (e.g., grinding, cooking), playing musical instruments, weaving, flint-knapping, or just chatting with friends.

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My thoughts are with the people of Sudan as the country, at the time of writing, is in the midst of a horrific war.

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Textiles Activities in Context: An Example of Craft Organization in Meroitic Sudan

Elsa Yvanez[1]

The past two decades have seen the significant development of settlement excavations in Sudan, especially in the Meroitic heartland, a region encompassing the capital city of Meroe, the surrounding riverine areas, and the Butana hinterlands. Along the eastern bank of the Nile, the Meroitic urban landscape is now defined by a chain of cities regularly spaced every c. 10 km, from Dangeil in the North to Wad ben Naga in the South.[2] Recent discoveries in Central Sudan and the Gebel Barkal region, as well as renewed studies of previous excavation results from Nubia and the city of Meroe, have noticeably increased our knowledge of the Meroitic urban life.[3] Meroitic town structure and organization are also better understood, thanks to the excavation of various settlements such as el-Hassa[4], Damboya[5], Hamadab[6], or Muweis.[7] These settlements show a consistent urban model built around a monumental center — consisting of a temple, a palace, and/or an administrative building — incorporated into residential quarters with domestic and industrial functions. The study of the material unearthed in these settlements has prompted a renewed interest in crafts and their integration in the economy

1 This paper is the updated publication of a talk given at the 12th International Conference for Meroitic Studies, organized by Pavel Onderka at Prague in September 2016, and reworked in 2022 as part of the *Fashioning Sudan* project (ERC 101039416), funded by the European Union. I thank the organizers of both the conference and the present volume for their support.

2 Baud, "Méroé, un monde urbain"; Wolf and Nowotnick, "The Meroitic Heartland"; Grzymski, "The City of Meroe."

3 Wolf, Nowotnick, and Edwards, "Settlement in the Meroitic Kingdom."

4 Rondot, "El-Hassa: un temple à Amon dans l'île de Méroé."

5 Maillot, "The Archaeological Site of Damboya"; Choimet, "The Meroitic Settlement at Damboya."

6 Wolf and Nowotnick, "Hamadab — A Meroitic Urban Settlement"; Nowotnick, *Ceramic Technology, Production and Use,* passim.

7 Baud, "The Meroitic Royal City of Muweis"; Millet, "Mouweis, une ville de l'Empire de Méroé."

of the Meroitic kingdom.[8] Among the various crafts represented, textile activities are certainly ubiquitous: textile implements are common finds, mainly characterized by a large number of spindle whorls and loom weights.[9] This body of evidence offers particularly interesting counterpoints to other textile implements discovered in Lower Nubia, which tend to come more often from funerary contexts. The sum of this material, added to the thousands of well-preserved textile fragments from the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic periods, paint a vivid image of textile production and uses in ancient Sudan and Nubia.

The spectrum of data coming from the entire geographical span of the Meroitic kingdom presents the rare opportunity to proceed to a modern-standard post-excavation analysis of textile production. We now have at our disposal a vast number of sources recording textile manufacturing and uses: raw material (textile fibers and archaeobotanical remains), textile production implements, finished fabrics, pieces of both clothing and furnishing textiles, archaeological information on the contexts of textile use and reuse, and iconographic representations of people wearing different types of garments.[10] In fact, the only "missing" sources are iconographic representations of the craft itself (scenes showing the process of spinning and weaving for example) and textual data such as written accounts or literary sources.[11]

The study of these different archaeological sources can lead to a comprehensive overview of textile production, which shows that textiles were deeply embedded in the social fabric of Meroitic life. This Meroitic "textile network" encompassed various spheres of the society, from agriculture and fiber collection to the cloth's manufacturing *chaîne opératoire*, all the way through the multiple every day uses and reuses of the fabrics to their final internment with the deceased. The sources and their relations can be summarized in a diagram displaying the interdependence between textiles and their production context (Fig.1).

8 This volume is a perfect incarnation of this renewed interest, as well as ongoing research projects such as the one on metallurgy led by Jane Humphris (UCL Qatar) or G. Choimet's doctoral work, see Choimet, "Habitat et urbanisme méroïtiques en Nubie et au Soudan central." Reappraisals of archival documentation from the Nubian campaign are also bringing new light on craft activities, notably textiles (see Mann and van den Bercken, "Shokan. Revival of a Forgotten Village." A similar dynamic was also at the root of the Meroe Archival Project, reexamining the excavation archives of Peter L. Shinnie from his work in settlement areas at Meroe.

9 For a description of textile implements and activities in a Meroitic and Post-Meroitic context, see for example Adams and Adams, *Qasr Ibrim: The Ballana Phase*, pp. 97—8., Yvanez, "De fil enaiguille : aspects de l'artisanat textile méroïtique."

10 Yvanez, "Clothing the Elite? Patterns of Textile Production and Consumption."

11 These sources are however well known for textile production in pharaonic Egypt (e.g. Vogelsang-Eastwood, "Textiles") or the Ancient Near East (Nosch, Koefoed, and Andersson Strand. *Textile Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East*).

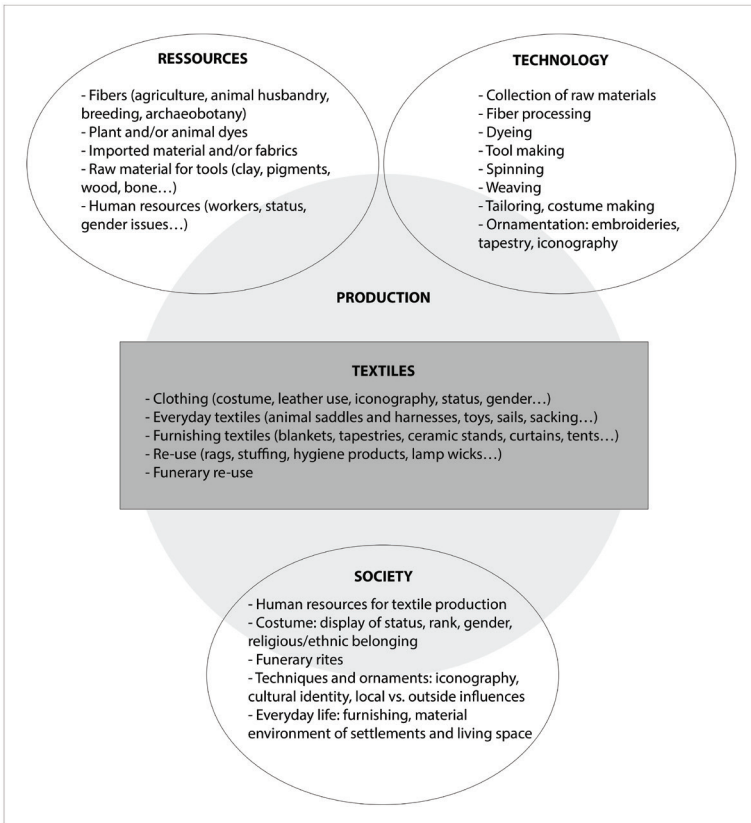

Figure 1. Textile production as interactions between resources, technology, and society (adapted from Andersson Strand et al., "Old Textiles, New Possibilities," p. 151).

Despite the inherent limitations of such theoretical models, this diagram successfully illustrates the textile artefacts within their own production environment. It highlights the results of a complex *chaîne opératoire* based on the interactions between resources (both raw materials and human resources), technology, and society. This outlook has been the underlying theme of recent research in ancient textile studies, which has led to noticeable advances in our understanding of past economies.[12] However, its application in the Nile valley remains restricted, with the exception of Barry Kemp and Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood's study on the New Kingdom textile industries of Amarna.[13]

12 The aims and methods of recent textile research are usefully exposed in Andersson Strand et al., "Old Textiles — New Possibilities" and Harlow and Nosch, "Weaving the Threads."

13 Kemp and Vogelsand-Eastwood. *The Ancient Textile Industry in Amarna.* Studies developing a similar scope are however blossoming, see e.g. the Marie Skłodowska Curie project EgYarn, led by C. Spinazzi-Lucchesi (MSCA 890144. *Unravelling the thread: textile production in New Kingdom Egypt*, Centre for Textile Research, Saxo institute, University of Copenhagen, 2021-2022). Many Egyptian urban sites continue to bring evidence of an extensive textile production, contemporary with the Meroitic period in Sudan. See for example the cases of Karanis (Thomas, *Textiles from Karanis*), Kellis (Bowen, "A Study of the Textile Industry

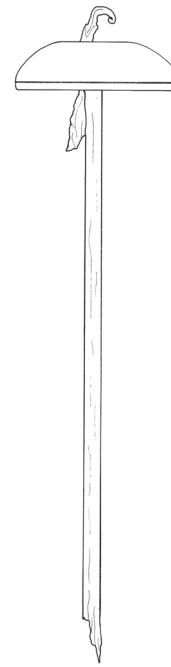

Figure 2. Complete spindle, Ballana, tomb B58. (Reproduced from Williams, *Meroitic Remains from Qustul and Ballana,* vol. 1, p. 159, fig. 61e. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

At the crossroads between Meroitic archaeology and ancient textile studies, this paper aims to explore the relationship between textile activities and the economy by focusing on the organization of textile production, especially on its integration into the living environment of the Meroitic population. Tila Island and the city of Meroe will provide two helpful case studies: by replacing textile implements in their archaeological locations — within houses and settlements — the present author hopes to identify the different types and scales of textile production occurring in Sudan.

Sources Documenting Textile Production in Meroitic Settlements

Spinning tools are by far the most prominent material source, especially the spindle whorls, which survived in the archaeological record in a much greater number than other wooden or metallic

at Ancient Kellis"), or the Roman-period forts of the Eastern desert (for a comprehensive bibliography, see Bender Jørgensen, "Textiles from Mons Claudianus, ʿAbu Shaʿar and other Roman sites").

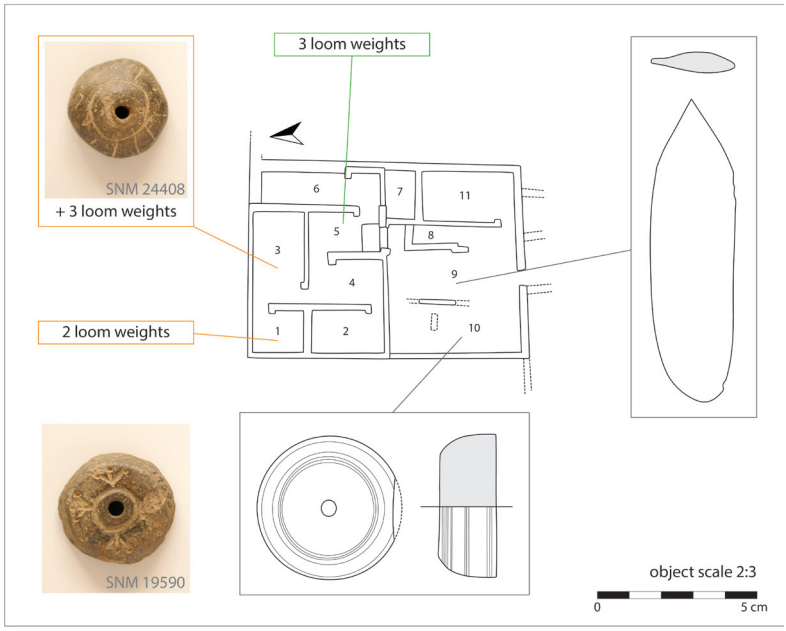

Figure 3. Tila Island, House VI: map and location of textile tools (photographs and drawings E. Yvanez. from A.J. Mills's excavation diaries, map reproduced from Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island," p. 113, fig. 36).

spindle pieces. Found at Ballana in grave B58, a complete spindle[14] provides a reliable example of this type of tools, its construction and use (Fig. 2).

This simple tool is composed of a spindle shaft and a whorl, placed at the top and secured by the insertion of a metal hook that was used to attach the newly formed yarn. In the hand or suspended and then set in motion, the tool rotates to twist the fibers together and form the thread. Regardless of the specific spinning technique, the spindle whorl acts as a flywheel, which increases the momentum of the spindle and maintains a longer and faster rotation. In Meroitic Sudan, spindle whorls were made of various materials such as ceramic, unbaked clay, wood, bone, stone, or pierced potsherds.[15] Despite this apparent material diversity, there is an interesting dichotomy between the artefacts recovered in Nubia, which favored turned wooden whorls, and those from Central Sudan, where decorated ceramic was clearly preferred (see Figs. 3, 5, 8).

Other types of implements — used for weaving this time — contribute additional material evidence of textile production. Due to the rare preservation of organic material on settlement sites, it has proved impossible to recognize with any certainty the wooden beams that made up ancient looms. However, frequent discoveries of pear-shaped weights indicate that, in Meroitic Sudan and Nubia,

14 Williams, *Meroitic Remains from Qustul and Ballana*, vol. 1, p. 159, fig. 61e.
15 Yvanez, "Spinning in Meroitic Sudan."

most weaving was done on a vertical loom called the "warp-weighted loom," in which the warp threads were drawn tight by a series of loom weights.[16] Often found in sets, loom weights could be made of stone or more commonly unbaked clay (see Figs. 4, 7). Small picks or spatulas made of bone or wood (see Fig. 5) have also frequently been associated with weaving, but their exact use remains unclear and open to debate.[17] They may have been used to pack the threads down on small and delicate areas of the weave or to correct mistakes and seem particularly useful for tapestry weaving.

During settlement excavations, spindle whorls, loom weights, and weaving picks are generally found in the filling of rooms and passageways, or in refuse deposits. They are seldom clearly associated with one specific context of floor level preserved *in situ*. This situation is particularly true in dense habitation quarters and long-lived towns, where many centuries of continued occupation and blowing sands have obscured the stratigraphy. For example, at Qasr Ibrim, hundreds of spindle whorls, as well as many loom weights and several comb beaters were found in the refuse deposits and the storage pits that filled the houses along "Tavern Street" and the alley itself.[18] Nevertheless, the careful study of selected contexts of discovery at Tila and Meroe, both well preserved and documented, can be combined with knowledge on the Meroitic textile *chaîne opératoire* to offer engaging elements of interpretation.

Textile Activities on Tila Island

The rocky island of Tila was located between the Semna and Attiri rapids, offering a small and protected bay where it was possible to anchor boats during the crossing of the Batn el-Haggar Cataract. This enviable situation led researchers to identify Tila as a station on the Nilotic trading route to the Aniba basin and then towards Egypt.[19] Facing the bay, this small Meroitic settlement was located on a rocky outcrop. It was excavated by A.J. Mills and J. Knustad between 1966 and 1968, as part as the UNESCO-Sudan Antiquities Service survey, and then extensively studied by D.N. Edwards.[20] The excavation revealed a settlement surrounded by a substantial enclosure wall covering a surface of about 2.25 hectares. It contains 11 buildings or building complexes dated from the 1st century to the end of the 3rd

16 For a description of the warp-weighted loom and its use, see Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles*, pp. 91—113.

17 Kemp and Vogelsand-Eastwood. *The Ancient Textile Industry in Amarna*, pp. 358-73. See also Spinazzi-Lucchesi, *The Unwound Thread*, pp. 91—3.

18 Adams and Adams, *Qasr Ibrim: The Ballaña Phase*, p. 98.

19 Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island."

20 I would like to express my gratitude to David N. Edwards, who generously shared the archival data regarding the site's textile manufacture and assisted in examining the archives to clarify the exact context of the tools' discovery.

century C.E. According to estimations, Tila's population remained quite limited, totaling between 56 and 102 people at a time, divided into about 20 households. Despite the small scale of Tila's settlement, an important number of textile implements were discovered scattered in the different buildings. The cross-study of excavation diaries, object inventories, and available drawings and plans, led to the localization of most of the tools and the reconstitution of their original context of use and discovery. This article will focus on four significant examples: houses VI, V, II and I.

House VI (Fig. 3)

House VI is formed by several living units and presents the same standardized house plan visible in other houses at Tila: a series of small rooms distributed around a central courtyard and directly opened to this outdoor space.[21] This architectural model, well suited to the Nubian climate, was coined by the excavators "house with loggia". A total of four bone picks were discovered in House VI: one in an open courtyard (room 9) and three scattered across the building. Two spindle whorls and two loom weights were also found in the filling. The excavation of House VI revealed several floor layers preserved *in situ*. In the northern house unit, level 1 gave us one spindle whorl and a set of three loom weights in a "loggia" type of room (room 3), open to the courtyard (room 4), while another set was found in an adjacent storage room (room 1). Level 2 gave us a second set of three loom weights, also found in a room open to the central courtyard (room 5).

House V

House V[22] continues to illustrate the use of the central courtyard for light textile work such as sewing. A long copper alloy needle was discovered in the large open space. In a small room, a bone pick was found inside a jar half-buried in the floor and containing small nail-like metal objects and a pin. This vessel was clearly used as a storage container for small, pointed objects, which could all have fulfilled similar functions.

21 Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island," pp. 112 — 3.
22 Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island," p. 112, fig. 35.

House I (Fig. 4)

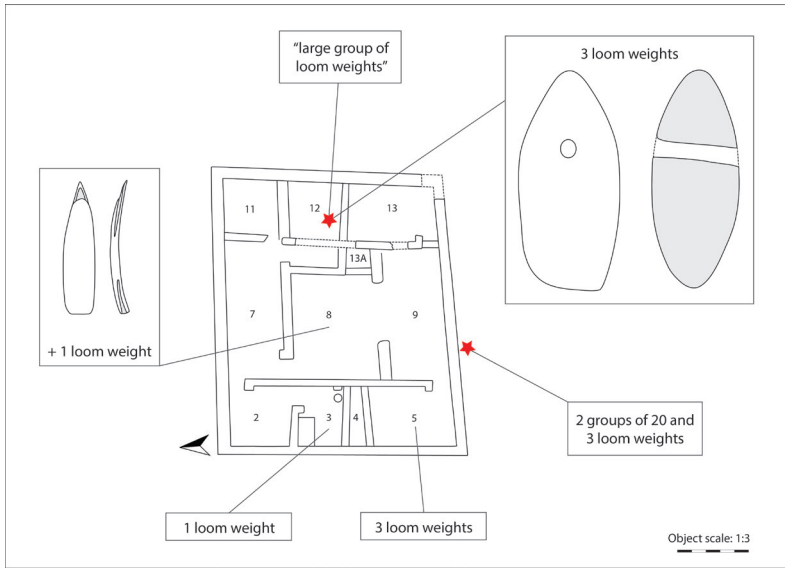

Figure 4.
Tila Island, House I: map and location of textile tools (drawings E. Yvanez. from A.J. Mills's excavation diaries, map reproduced from Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island," p. 106, fig. 30).

The first occupation level in House I was relatively well preserved under brick rubble.[23] The structure consists of a roughly rectangular building centered around a courtyard, with a series of three utilitarian rooms along the west side for storage and cooking activities, one room on the north side, a large single room on the east side, and a possible staircase to the roof. The eastern room — the "loggia" — was most likely opened at least partially to the courtyard. An interesting group of varied textile implements was found in House I, directly *in situ* or inside the fill layers above the floors:

- House exterior, directly along the southern wall: two sets of respectively 3 and 20 loom weights.
- Central courtyard (room 8): 1 loom weight and 1 bone pick.
- Kitchen area (room 3): 1 loom weight.
- Storage area (room 5): 1 set of 3 loom weights.
- "Loggia" (rooms 12-13): 3 loom weights and another "large group of loom weights" (excavation diaries, number unspecified).

It is unfortunate not to have a precise number for the "large group of loom weights" found in the "loggia," as this information could have helped us determine the number and size of the looms that could have been working at the same time in this building. However, it is

23 Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island," p. 106, fig. 30.

clear that the "loggia", with its protected but well-lit space, would have been perfectly suited to weaving activities. The concentration of these different types of textile tools and the possible presence of several looms in the loggia are rather striking for a small structure such as House I.

House II (Figs. 5-6-7)

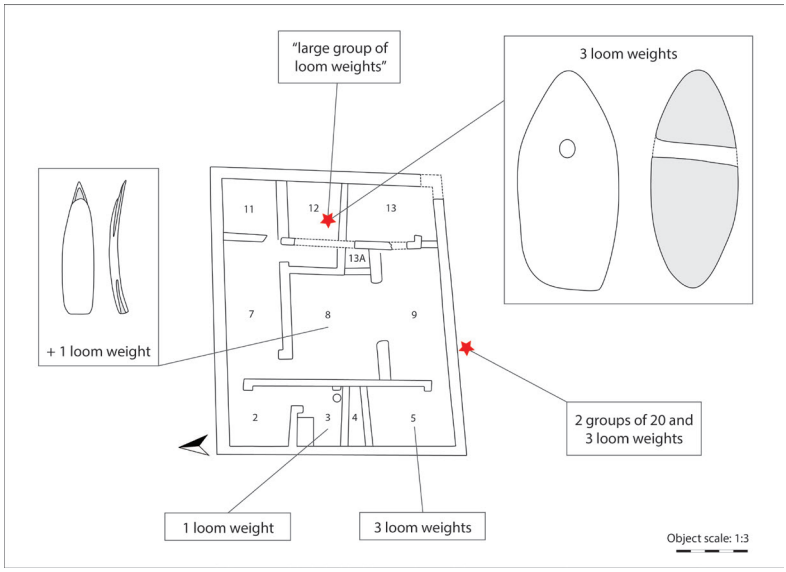

Figure 5.
Tila Island, House II: bone points (drawings E. Yvanez from A.J. Mills's excavation diaries).

House II is a building complex formed by at least nine different housing units.[24] Textile tools were found dispersed without distinction throughout many rooms and occupation levels. The inventories specifically list seven bone picks (Fig. 5), two spindle whorls, and one needle. The various locations of their discovery offer another illustration of the different kinds of storage and/or refuse contexts where textile implements can be found. In the case of House II, they appeared in the kitchen area, in a small, vaulted storage chamber, and in a storage area with jars. A group of two spindle whorls and one bone pick were also discovered discarded in a small cellar, which appears to have been used as a latrine (Fig. 6).

Besides the tools listed in the inventories, the archives also provided a very useful excavation photograph that completes the object list from House II. The image (Fig. 7) shows about 350 loom weights, all pear-shaped and made of unbaked clay, neatly arranged in small groups of about ten specimens on a sandy surface overlooking the building remains. Taken shortly after the

24 Edwards, "Appendix 3. The Meroitic settlement on Tila Island," pp. 108-11, figs. 31, 32.

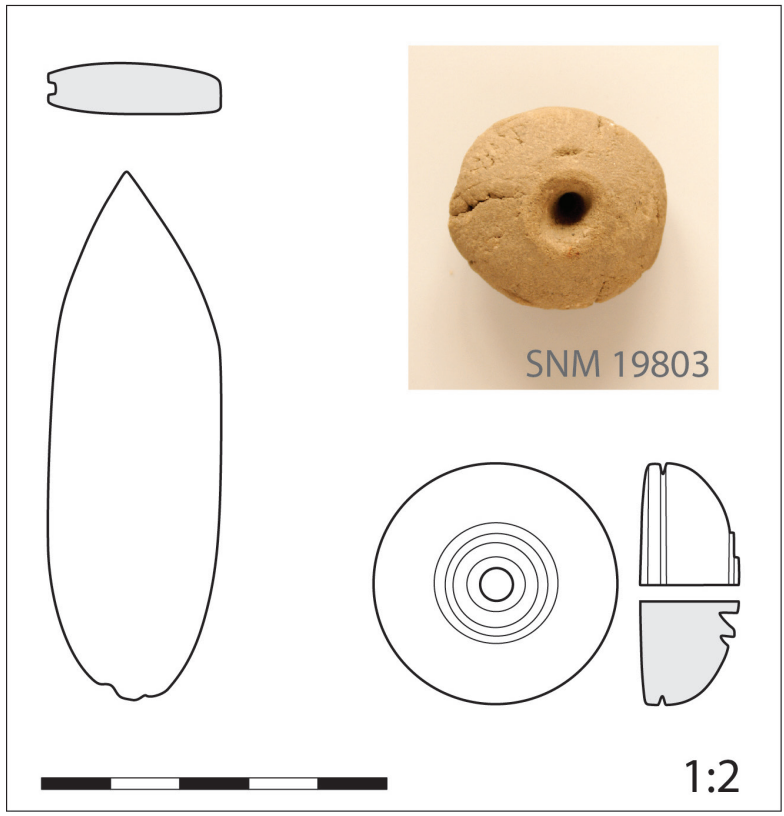

Figure 6.
Tila Island, House II: spindle whorls and bone point discarded in latrines (room 7) (photograph and drawings E. Yvanez from A.J. Mills's excavation diaries).

excavation of the complex in March 1968, the photograph (ref. F/445: 6) is captioned "House II collection of loom weights". In the present state of the documentation, it is difficult to be absolutely sure that all loom weights shown in the photograph were indeed found in House II, or if they correspond to different groups unearthed on the site since the previous year excavations (such as the "large group of loom weights found in House I") and only collected there. The caption seems however to point towards a sole discovery in House II. In any case, it seems that a very big group of loom weights was indeed found in this large complex, possibly spread around different rooms and/or occupation layers.

If we attempt to summarize the data relative to loom weights, we reach a total of at least 389 specimens, which does not include the groups of unspecified number found in Houses I and VI. To our knowledge, it is the largest group of such implements ever discovered in Sudan and Nubia.

Figure 7. Tila Island, "House II collection of loom weights" (excavation photograph ref. F/445: 6, A.J. Mills archives, courtesy of David Edwards).

As a whole, information related to textile production at Tila shows that spinning, weaving, and sewing were all practiced together within the same domestic structures. Spinning was carried out everywhere in the house, probably at the same time as other domestic activities such as food preparation. On the other hand, weaving is much more reliant on adequate positioning of the loom, sufficient space, and optimal lighting conditions. At Tila, it occurred within well-lit spaces, in the open or semi-open rooms leading to the courtyard (e.g. the "loggias") or on one occasion directly alongside the house perimeter, thereby taking advantage of the Nubian climate and domestic architecture. The looms were most likely leaning against the wall, protected from direct sunlight by the "loggia's" roof or a light structure such as an awning. When not in use, textile implements could be placed in storage and service areas often associated with culinary functions. Attested in both Sudan and other geo-historical areas, the frequent association of textile implements with remains of other household tasks, such as food preparation, led some researchers to believe that textile making must have been a primarily female activity[25] and linked it to the basic sustenance strategy of the household.

25 Gender studies have always been an important part of ancient textiles research (see for example "Women's Work", *in* Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles*, pp. 283 — 98). For a modern scholarly perspective and references, see Harlow and Nosch "Weaving the Threads," pp.

Table 1. Summary count of loom weights per structure at Tila Island.

Structure	Number of loom weights per context type
House I	House exterior: 23 Central courtyard: 1 Kitchen / storage areas: 4 "Loggia": 3 + "a very large group"
House II	c. 350
House V	None
House VI	Filling: 2 "Loggia": 3 Storage areas: set of unspecified number Room opened to courtyard: 3

However, the number of textile implements at Tila, especially associated with weaving, seems to tell a rather different story. On the one hand, Houses V and VI, with their rather limited corpus, could point towards a domestic production with no specialization of space or person. There, the scale of the production seems to have been limited, the data clearly indicating a local manufacture and consumption. On the other hand, the large groups of loom weights found in House II and presumably House I could have supplied the installation of several looms, conjointly operated by a small group of weavers working on different pieces of fabric at the same time. The production output would have increased significantly, becoming easily superior to the households' needs. The sum of this data clearly shows the importance of textile activities on Tila Island, which is particularly noticeable and surprising for such a small settlement.

Textile Activities at Meroe

Textile activities are well represented in the capital city of Meroe. The objects were mainly discovered between 1965 and 1984 during P.L. Shinnie's excavations[26] and, to a lesser extent, during earlier works conducted by J. Garstang in the Amun temple,[27] as well as recent excavations.[28] Most of the textile implements, predominantly spindle whorls, were sent to the Sudan National Museum while a smaller group joined the collections of the Petrie Museum in London. Research in those two museums, as well as through the publications and object inventories, have led to the identification of 238 spindle

10 — 11. If the link with the household is clearly established in ancient Sudanese contexts, no data pertaining to gender and a gendered differentiation of labor has come to light.

26 Shinnie and Bradley, *The Capital of Kush I*, and Shinnie and Anderson, *The Capital of Kush II*.

27 Török, *Meroe City*.

28 More spindle whorls have been discovered during Jane Humphris's excavations at Meroe for the UCL Qatar Sudan archaeological project. Found in different contexts and under current study, these objects have not been added to the present paper.

whorls, 110 loom weights, 1 needle, and 1 spool with cotton threads still attached.[29] This corpus of material forms the second largest group of textile-related tools in Sudan. Its quantity is significant but by no means very large; by comparison, the biggest corpus is estimated at about 3000 spindle whorls and comes from the southern site of Abu Geili.[30] Outside of a small group of spindle whorls and loom weights without context information, it was possible to locate most of the artefacts discovered during excavations, mainly along trenches and test pits:

Context	Number of textile tools
Ceramic ovens area inside the Amun temple's temenos (M260)	12 spindle whorls
Iron scories mound H (test pit)	7 spindle whorls 2 loom weights
Trench TT6, domestic levels	38 spindle whorls 22 loom weights 1 needle
North mound, domestic and industrial occupation levels	128 spindle whorls 79 loom weights 1 spool

Table 2. Summary of textile tools per context, Meroe.

The Meroe spindle whorls form a homogeneous group made of well-burnished ceramics in conical or biconical shapes, with the upper surface almost always decorated by incised or impressed patterns (Fig. 8). The specimens from the oven area (M260) were likely found within their manufacturing context, as they were accompanied by several other small faience and ceramic objects produced within the temple's temenos.

Mound H

The seven spindle whorls and two loom weights from Mound H belong to domestic occupation levels, built on top of several layers of iron scories, wind-blown sand, and domestic refuse. The mudbrick structures offered a number of small rooms equipped with cooking installations. In this case, the test pit seems to reveal small-scale textile production, probably linked to domestic activities, and integrated in a residential reoccupation level.

29 At the time of this study, I was unfortunately unable to locate any loom weight, nor the needle and spool, which whereabouts remain unknown. Further investigations in the site storage rooms and in the Khartoum University collections, as part of the Meroe Archival Project, might increase and precise the present list (A. Boozer, pers. comm.).

30 Yvanez, "Spinning in Meroitic Sudan."

Figure 8. Ceramic spindle whorl from Meroe-city with pattern of a sorgho plant, from oven area M260. SNM 604 (photograph E. Yvanez, courtesy of the Sudan National Museum).

Trench TT6

A similar production profile emerges from trench TT6 (Fig. 9). The majority of the tools found *in situ* belong to the oldest occupation level in two or three house buildings dated to the Early Meroitic period.[31] Scattered throughout the buildings were sixteen spindle whorls, five loom weights, and one needle, thereby attesting three of the main stages of the textile *chaîne opératoire*. For example, the house located in the I/J50 square contained six spindle whorls and two loom weights, while the neighboring building in the H/G50 square had three whorls and one weight. The other artefacts came from small residential refuse deposits, often placed in pits, or abandoned buildings, which the excavator dated to the Classic and Late Meroitic periods. These houses included many rooms and covered a significant surface that probably accommodated numerous people. It is therefore not surprising to find within their walls a great number of textile tools, accumulated by several generations. The context of textile production is still domestic, here distributed along a residential street of Meroe.

North mound

The northern part of the North mound was explored by three main trenches that revealed a dense settlement, organized into several building units separated by narrow alleys. The numerous textile

31 Focused on test pits and trenches, the methodology followed by P.L. Shinnie did not allow for the excavation of complete building structures. The objects are therefore attached to numbered "squares," making their attribution to specific houses difficult and hypothetical. For a description of excavation techniques and maps, see Shinnie and Bradley, *The Capital of Kush I*.

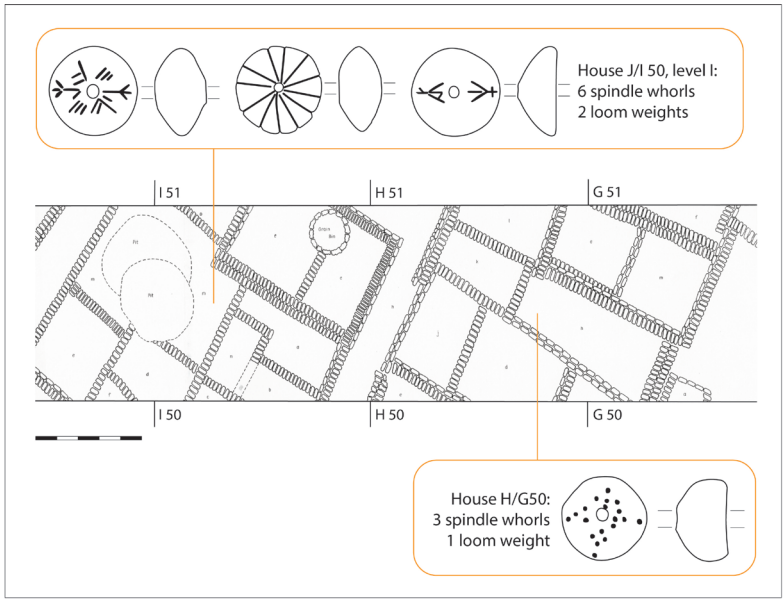

Figure 9. Meroe-city, trench TT6 between I and G 50/51: map and location of textile tools (drawings E. Yvanez, reproduced from Shinnie & Bradley, *The Capital of Kush I*, fig. 8, fig. 81-82, 216-217).

implements (128 spindle whorls and 79 loom weights listed) were discovered scattered over the different structures as well as inside intrusive layers of abandonment and refuse deposits. The results of the first excavation campaigns, along trench 79/80, provide us with the best contextual information. While many of the tools come from multifunctional areas linked to cooking and food storage, several groups of tools are associated to specific spaces.

For example, an interesting group of approximately thirty spindle whorls was discovered in a large open-air space in front of buildings II.A and II.B. Other crafts such as faience manufacturing and minor metallurgy work were also carried out on the same terrace. This particular location seems to have been used as a multifunctional public space, where Meroe's inhabitants could practice small crafts and industries. Spinning, a very portable activity, would have obviously been perfectly suited to this type of multifunctional open space. It also reminds us of the fundamental social dimension of spinning: it is a long and fastidious work, but it does not continuously engage one's attention, so it becomes easy and much more agreeable to accomplish this task while chatting or sharing small chores with other members of the community. Often interpreted as a female activity, this "courtyard sisterhood" can be observed in many populations, both ancient and modern.[32] In African cotton-producing countries, such as Mali for example, sorting cotton balls, fiber preparation, and spinning traditionally

32 Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles*, pp. 84—6.

take place in courtyards and communal spaces where women gather to share the work and exchange words.[33]

Another group of textile implements came from building I.A, in squares O79/80 and N79/80, a large structure distinguished by its peculiar internal organization (Fig. 10).[34] The building possesses an important number of small rooms, probably storage rooms, and a large L-shaped open courtyard where two spindle whorls were found. Its main feature was the construction of a hydraulic system, west of the courtyard. The structure started by a very deep well, which fed two succeeding basins connected between each other by a narrow slopping ramp, covered with waterproof plaster. Its exact function remains unknown but its sole presence indicates the industrial character of the building. A total of eighteen spindle whorls, three loom weights, and one needle was found scattered throughout the rooms, to which we can tentatively add a grinding stone fragment reused as a weight. It is very tempting to link this group of textile implements to the hydraulic artisanal installation and postulate the presence of a textile workshop with decantation vats for dyeing. Unfortunately, the stratigraphic evidence is not sufficient to pursue this attractive hypothesis any further. No traces of dyes, pigments or hearth have been reported for this specific space, therefore its use for dye preparation or leather work remains one theory amidst others. It seems clear however, that textile activities were an important aspect of the life of this building, and that they were inserted within a mixed domestic and industrial urban environment.

Discussion

Despite the geographic distance between Tila and Meroe and their fundamental difference in nature, the two settlements present a coherent image of textile production in two regions of the Meroitic kingdom. As in Tila, spinning, weaving, and sewing were all practiced together at Meroe, within the same spaces and structures, resulting in tools scattered amongst the buildings and public areas. Spinning is particularly well attested in open-air spaces (such as courtyards, streets, and alleys). As a whole, spinning and weaving were present in both domestic and industrial or semi-industrial areas.

The data from Meroe is difficult to interpret with any certainty, as the excavation campaigns differed in scale and methods. Trenches, squares, and test pits provided windows into occupation phases that

33 Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, p. 31.
34 Shinnie and Bradley, *The Capital of Kush I*, pp. 64—5.

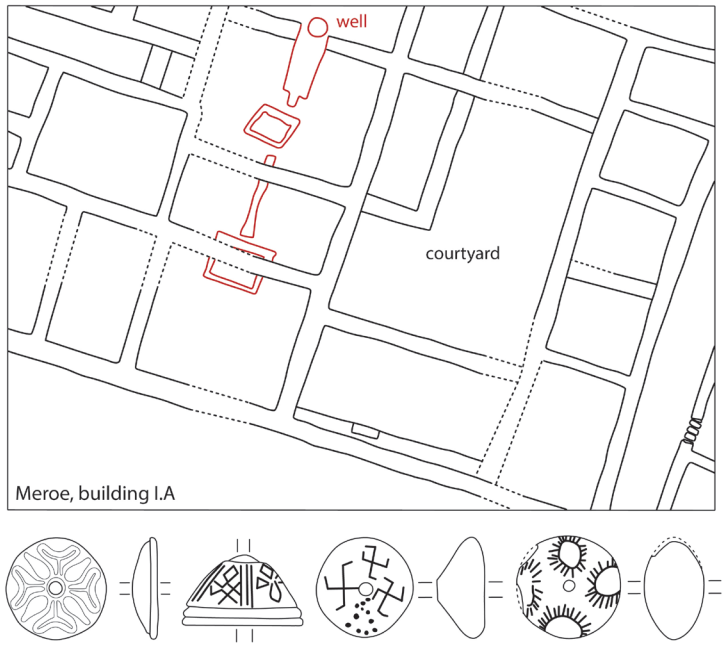

Figure 10. Meroe-city, north mount building I.A: map and location of textile tools (drawings E. Yvanez reproduced from Shinnie & Bradley, *The Capital of Kush I*, fig. 23, fig. 81-82, 216-217).

are now difficult to reconcile. Building an overall understanding of each structure remains elusive to this day. On such shaky grounds, one can only propose a preliminary hypothesis stating the existence, at Meroe, of two types of textile production. First, a limited production would have occurred in domestic residential areas to fulfill the household's needs, most probably without involving special workers or locations. The second type of textile manufacturing appears to be a small-scale industrial production taking place on the North mound, still in domestic settings or semi-industrial areas embedded in a residential neighborhood. The number of tools alone indicates a larger output of textile production, maybe a limited surplus, which may have answered the demands of the local administrative and religious elite. However, as far as we know from the available data, textile making occurred in multifunctional areas used for various crafts.

I have tried in this paper to describe the artefacts related to textile production and to assign them to clear *loci* in the Meroitic urban environment. We have also attempted to replace this production in the larger textile economy. However, it is crucial to realize that this evidence cannot be a true indicator of the scale of production

in any absolute terms.[35] If tools can help us trace different stages of the manufacturing process, many aspects of the Meroitic "textile market" remains little known, such as the question of maintenance and reuse, centralization of the production, or trade and exchange.[36] A general panorama can be drawn in broad strokes, merging different sources. It seems that textile making was organized as either a domestic activity or a small-scale industry, with a seemingly limited production output. No true textile workshop has been identified yet in Meroitic Sudan. The only location where such a production type was hypothesized is the Isis temple at Qasr Ibrim, in levels dated to the very end of the Post-Meroitic era.[37] The question of how to define a textile workshop in a Meroitic context is difficult to answer, as the current theoretical models do not apply to this type of region and socio-economic organization.[38] In the case of the Isis temple, the building did not offer a specialized space or installation, and the production was probably restricted to the temple's needs. In this framework, the involvement of the central power and religious administration in the control of textile production is still very much an open topic. Nonetheless, the creation of a cohesive and distinct Meroitic tradition (or "style") shows that textile production still obeyed a certain degree of standardization, whose agents and dynamics remain unknown. This small industry was no doubt an important one, producing luxury fabrics in cotton with blue decorations in tapestry and embroideries for the confection of elite and royal clothing.[39]

At first glance, this seems difficult to fit with the archaeological context of tools found principally in domestic contexts. In many ways, the data presented in this paper illustrates how deeply embedded textile production was in the everyday life of the Meroites. Spinning and weaving appear fully integrated in domestic spaces, either in share public areas or in the house itself, regardless of the structure's size. This proves to hold for both densely populated settlements such as Meroe or spread around compounds in more rural settings such as Tila. Furthermore, textile activities were not separated from other daily tasks, but mixed with food production and other small

35 Even in much better documented contexts, such as Pompeii, relating traces of crafts to a greater economic organization remains difficult, see Flohr, "The Textile Economy of Pompeii."

36 Yvanez, "Precious textiles"; "Clothing the elite"; and Yvanez and Wozniak, "Cotton in ancient Sudan and Nubia."

37 Adams, "Sacred Textiles"; Adams and Adams, *Qasr Ibrim, The Ballana Phase*, pp. 60—1, 129—37.

38 Spinazzi-Lucchesi and Yvanez, "Textile Workshops in the Nile Valley?".

39 For a comprehensive view of Meroitic textile technics and clothing, see Adams, "Sacred Textiles"; Wild, "Fringes and Aprons"; Yvanez, "De fil en aiguille : aspects de l'artisanat textile méroïtique" and "Clothing the Elite? Patterns of Textile Production and Consumption."

crafts. We can therefore infer that, whatever the size or economic weight of the Meroitic textile industry, it rested principally on the domestic sphere with a household-based workforce (either direct members of the family or associated retainers).

How did textile activities affect the daily life of people living in these settlements? In the absence of written accounts, we need to rely on our knowledge of the textile *chaîne opératoire* and Meroitic settlement organization to get a glimpse of the life experiences of textile craft people. The number of tools from places such as Tila, Meroe's North Mound, or Abu Geili certainly indicates that many people dedicated a vast amount of time to process fibres and threads.[40] Because spindle whorls appear in varied contexts across settlements and because spinning is a portable and time-consuming activity, we can imagine that several individuals could be seen spinning in streets and other communal spaces on a very regular basis. During the harvest season, we can also picture a heightened activity involving more people and more time, as well as installations to store the unprocessed fibres. Weaving on the other hand seems to have been attached more often to a specific domestic structure, especially to spaces open or semi-open to light and air. These courtyards or "loggias" provided an ideal environment to weave in relatively protected conditions, while still being able to interrupt one's work and tend to other tasks, such as food processing or child rearing.[41] They are also vast enough to build looms accommodating several weavers, if needed, and provided just enough space to keep a loom active while not being in the way of other people or activities. Thus, the rhythmic sounds of the loom weights and the shuttle can be added to our sensory reconstruction of the Meroitic courtyards.

However, to precise this picture and truly understand the socio-economic dimensions of textile activities, we need to learn more about who was making textiles and what output could they possibly produce. We therefore hope that new data coming from recent settlement excavations and archival work will further enhance our understanding of textile and craft activities, and the Meroitic domestic and economic landscapes.[42]

40 Yvanez, "Spinning in Meroitic Sudan."

41 Barber, *Women's Work*. Textile crafts (especially weaving) are frequently associated to mixed activities in domestic settings, from contexts and production scales as different as Roman Pompeii or Viking Age long houses, see Flohr, "Working and Living Under One Roof" and Andersson Strand, "Engendering Central Places."

42 This article was composed before the interruption of archaeological excavations caused by the war and associated rise in illegal digging. As we fervently hope for peace and for the resuming of our work in the field, this article shows the potential of re-investigating legacy collections.

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The Use and Experience of Painting Materials in Ancient and Modern Nubia

Kate Fulcher

Ancient people used colour in their homes for many of the same reasons as people do today — to lighten walls, to highlight important areas, to signal types of use of spaces, to proclaim status within the community. The painting materials considered here are from the ancient town of Amara West, which is situated between the Second and Third Cataracts of the Nile, and was inhabited from c. 1250 to 800 BC. It was founded by ancient Egyptians in the reign of Seti I as one of a series of temple towns in the region, in order to control local resources.[1] Excavations at Amara West were initiated by the Egypt Exploration Society in 1939, and were revisited by the British Museum from 2008 to 2018. The EES seasons uncovered the temple and two town areas, including a residence bearing inscriptions relating to two holders of the office "Deputy of Kush," which indicates that the town was an administrative centre of Kush (Upper Nubia).[2] The British Museum excavations focused on the ancient town and discovered evidence for the preparation and use of paint in white, red, yellow, black, blue, and green colours.

Certain features of the site suggest that it was inhabited by both Egyptians and Nubians; graves at Amara West display a variety of forms, including Nubian and Egyptian, and in some cases, a mix between the two.[3] Pottery assemblages from the settlement comprise between 1% and 10% Nubian vessels, typically cooking pots.[4] Although the town architecture is consistent with that found in contemporary Egyptian settlements, an oval architectural

1 Spencer, "Building on New Ground."
2 Spencer, *Amara West I: The Architectural Report.*
3 Binder, "The New Kingdom Tombs at Amara West."
4 Spataro, Millet, and Spencer, "The New Kingdom Settlement of Amara West (Nubia, Sudan)."

Figure 1.
Map of the Nile Valley showing locations of places mentioned in text.

feature at Amara West is more consistent with Nubian architectural tradition.[5]

There are many modern settlements in the area surrounding Amara West, including the town of Abri on the opposite shoreline, and Ernetta Island. The inhabitants of these towns and villages use both modern paint, purchased at the market, and traditional pigments, gathered from the landscape, to decorate their houses.

Ancient evidence

Paints and pigments were found from all areas of the town of Amara West, in the form of lumps of raw pigment (red, yellow, blue), broken pottery used as paint palettes (red, yellow, blue, green, black, and white), paint applied on walls (red, yellow, blue, black, and white) (fig. 2), and residue on grinding stones (red, yellow, green). There were two cemeteries used by the town, both were in use over the course of the town's history. Coffins were very fragmentary due to termite action; painted plaster (white, black, red, yellow, and blue) was found related to coffin fragments in several tombs.

5 Spencer, "Nubian Architecture in an Egyptian Town?"

Scientific analyses identified the pigments and binders used at Amara West.[6] Yellow and red were both ochres, and could have been sourced locally. Blue pigment was mostly Egyptian blue, manufactured using copper, silica, and flux at a high temperature, which was probably imported, as no evidence for local manufacture has been found. A second blue was identified as riebeckite and was probably sourced from further south, where sources of this rock are known.[7] Whites were mainly gypsum and calcite, the origin of which is not clear; white pigment used in modern times and collected from the desert was found to be dolomite, which was not found in the ancient town.[8] Blacks were carbon, easily obtainable by burning organic material, and bitumen, obtained from the Dead Sea.[9] Greens were chlorite (green earth), probably local, and copper chloride, either a degradation product of malachite or manufactured from copper.[10] Very few contemporary domestic sites are known from Egypt and even fewer from Nubia. From the evidence we have it seems that ochres, Egyptian blue, carbon, and gypsum plaster were commonly used materials.[11] Riebeckite has not previously been reported, and may have been a locally sourced blue(ish) pigment as an alternative for Egyptian blue. Bitumen has been reported once previously,[12] but could have been under-identified from other sites. Greens in Egypt are more commonly Egyptian green, and the range of greens used is debated, but the identified palette seems to be expanding.[13]

Several of the paints from palettes, and plaster from the walls, were analysed for carbohydrate. Of the seventeen samples analysed, eight contained positive evidence of monosaccharides, indicating that plant gum had been added to the pigment as a binder. Acacia trees, from which gum Arabic can be harvested, grow in the local area, and were also present in ancient times, as evidenced by plant remains from Amara West.[14]

6 Fulcher, *Painting Amara West;* Fulcher et al., "Multi-Scale Characterization of Unusual Green and Blue Pigments from the Pharaonic Town of Amara West, Nubia"; Fulcher, Stacey, and Spencer, "Bitumen from the Dead Sea in Early Iron Age Nubia."
7 Fulcher et al., "Multi-Scale Characterization of Unusual Green and Blue Pigments from the Pharaonic Town of Amara West, Nubia."
8 Fulcher, *Painting Amara West,* p. 43.
9 Fulcher, Stacey, and Spencer, "Bitumen from the Dead Sea in Early Iron Age Nubia."
10 Fulcher et al., "Multi-Scale Characterization of Unusual Green and Blue Pigments from the Pharaonic Town of Amara West, Nubia."
11 Fulcher and Budka, "Pigments, Incense, and Bitumen from Sai."
12 Siddell, "Appendix 6."
13 Lacovara and Winkels, "Malqata: The Painted Palace".
14 Cartwright and Ryan, "Archaeobotanical Research at Amara West in New Kingdom Nubia."

Figure 2. Fragment of painted wall plaster from house E13.7 at Amara West (F5049c).

Ethnoarchaeology

Archaeological sites provide a huge amount of data about the tangible remains but it can be difficult to interpret these in terms of the human beings who created and used them. Interviews were conducted with the populations local to Amara West, focusing on the collection of painting materials, the method of preparation and application, and the people who performed these actions. The interviews were intended to provide an insight into human considerations, actions, and decisions in relation to the painting of houses in the area.

Twelve interviews were conducted in January 2015 with residents in areas near to Amara West, which is itself uninhabited. Interviews took place in three locations (fig. 1): (1) Ernetta, an island in the Nile and location of the expedition house, between Amara West and Abri, the local town on the mainland; (2) Amara East, a village east / downstream of Abri, on the opposite bank of the Nile from Amara West; and (3) the large island of Sai, about 11km upstream of Amara West, which has archaeological evidence of inhabitation broadly

concurrent with Amara West.[15] The interviewees consisted of 10 women and 7 men, sometimes interviewed singly and sometimes as a pair (either married couple or mother and daughter). The interviewees were approached at random while wandering around the areas mentioned looking for painted houses. The majority were middle aged (35-55) as it was thought they would be the most likely to have had experience in painting a house, with three older (age unknown, 1 man and 2 women) and two younger participants (2 women in their mid 20s). It was hoped the older interviewees would remember times before acrylic paint and plastic paintbrushes were available.

In all three locations, houses consisted of an outside wall, within which stood the main house and several outbuildings, usually built of courses of mud-brick (*jālūṣ*), with some walls painted.[16] The most common colours were white, yellow, and red. Floors and some outside walls were mud-plastered in a circular pattern (fig. 3).

Houses could be painted with *bōmastik* (modern acrylic paint) or *jir* (powdered rock). Before *bōmastik* was available in the market, everyone used *jir,* which was collected from the desert. Now *jir* may also be purchased from the market. There was some consensus that yellow and white *jir* were the best to use, and that the use of colour was a fairly modern initiative (last 50 years). It was known that red *jir* could be made by placing yellow *jir* on the fire, but red *jir* was not popular. However, both red and yellow *bōmastik* was commonly used. *Bōmastik* is affected by strong heat and light but the desert *jir* is not affected, therefore *jir* was commonly used for the outside walls in the courtyard, and *bōmastik* for the interior (fig. 3). White gypsum is also used, either in a thick paste to mend cracks, or as a thinner paint for a decorative line around the top of a wall. This is always purchased from the market.

Either men or women can travel into the desert to collect *jir.* Several locations were mentioned often connected with a certain colour of *jir,* and it was also said that usually one travelled to near the place known for *jir* and asked around as to the best place to dig. Often donkeys are taken to help carry the *jir* back, and one woman mentioned carrying it in her scarf. The people who collected it may then be open to selling some of it to their neighbours.

The *jir* is prepared by placing a lump of it into a container of water and variously leaving it to settle, straining off the gritty bits with a scarf or sieve, or giving it a stir with a hand. A traditionally made sieve was described by one man as being made from muslin-

15 Budka, "Life in the New Kingdom Town of Sai Island: Some New Perspectives."
16 Dalton, "Reconstructing Lived Experiences of Domestic Space at Amara West: Some Preliminary Interpretations of Ancient Floor Deposits Using Ethnoarchaeological and Micromorphological Analyses"; Wenzel, *House Decoration in Nubia.*

type material that is stretched taut over a frame and glued in place using starch from *ḥilba* seeds (fenugreek). Sometimes gum Arabic is added, this can be bought from the market or picked off a tree.

Most interviewees stated that men were responsible for painting with modern acrylic paint and women for the mudplastering and *jir*. However, there seemed to be some leeway, with men helping to apply *jir* in hard-to-reach areas. Either could use gypsum. Men could be paid for their painting work, but the suggestion of paying someone to apply *jir* was met with derision. Most of the time it is the family who paints the house, but neighbours might help if it is a big job. When the plaster and/or *jir* is renewed, the women and jirls of the neighbourhood get together and paint each house in turn, going from one to the other as a group. It is very social with chatting and laughing. If it doesn't rain, they repaint approximately every 2 to 4 years. At times of celebration also they might renew the *jir*.

Girls watch and learn from their older female relatives how to do the mud-plastering and jir. They start contributing to the mud-plastering at about the age of 15, but the painting is easy and they could begin younger. There was no upper age limit, the only limitation being physical ability to participate in the work. Using modern acrylic paints appeared to have very little importance or social cache, they were just useful material for painting. However, mudplastering and applying *jir* was described as more socially embedded and more gendered. This was a skill that was passed down the generations, and had social activities attached to it that linked the family and their house into the community.

These days everyone uses plastic brushes bought from the market to apply paint, but several interviewees remembered their older relatives using a piece of leather with the hair still attached to paint the *jir* onto the walls, or a sheep's tail. One family poured *jir* over the walls from a teapot.

Re-construction of ancient painting materials

Various raw materials need to be collected and processed to make paint, and ancillary materials are also needed, for example, paintbrushes, grinding stones, and palettes. Information gleaned from the archaeological evidence and ethnographic interviews was combined to inform the types of materials and processes that were required.

The first material to obtain in order to make paint is the raw pigment itself. The exact location of the ancient sources of pigment is not known; the white rock that was collected for this experiment was one of the sources of *jir* used today by local inhabitants for

Figure 3.
House of one of the respondents. Interior (left) painted in red and yellow *bōmastik*; exterior (right) mud plastered in a circular pattern and painted with yellow jir.

painting their houses. It took 25 minutes to walk there from Amara West across the desert. Facing north from Amara West the land dips into the paleochannel, which early in the history of the town would have been flowing with water and would have required a boat to cross, but which within one generation had become dry for much of the year. Beyond this the land rises to Cemetery D. A person or group heading north would either have to walk through or around the cemetery. Either way, they see from the town side, and then pass by, three pyramids each standing to a height of 10 metres. Perhaps more importantly to these people, there would also be the graves of their own ancestors, which they may have visited regularly to lay offerings and ask favours.[17] As the people moved away from the town and the cemetery, the noises of life, of animals, of work and play, would have faded away, and been replaced by the quiet of the desert. They may have set out early on their journey, to avoid the heat of the day. In which case the sun would have only just been rising as they made their way to the top of the escarpment that then drops away into the desert. In modern times there is almost no vegetation visible but when Amara West was inhabited the landscape would have been less dry and desolate than it is today. The desert is scattered with archaeological remains,[18] the inhabitants of Amara West would have been familiar with this evidence of previous inhabitants; this was not a virgin site, the area already had a history. During the New Kingdom some of the historic buildings may have still have been standing, providing oases of shelter.[19] The current residents of the area are familiar with the archaeological remains around them, and often visit them for a picnic.

The route to the rock sources would have been known, and younger people would have learnt the route by accompanying more experienced people on the journey. On arrival at the source, they would have dug out the pigment. Ceramic containers are heavy, so perhaps they used bags, baskets, or scarves. Modern people use large metal cans (*sofiha,* fig. 4), thobes (a woman's wrap around

17 Binder, "The New Kingdom Tombs at Amara West," p. 604.
18 Stevens and Garnett, "Surveying the Pharaonic Desert Hinterland of Amara West."
19 Ibid.

Figure 4. Sofiha can containing jir.

garment) or scarves. To dig they may have mainly used their hands, or small metal or stone tools. A piece of flat stone picked up in the desert would make an effective shovel and obviate the need to carry a tool from the town and back.

Alongside the raw materials, a set of tools is also required. A grinding stone of some sort is needed, and this either means sourcing a schist rock from the desert or finding one that has been previously used. Another tool required is a hammerstone. The Nile bank at the local town across the river (Abri) is a shingle beach from where it is a simple task to pick up various smooth hand-sized rocks. A large stash of such rocks was excavated behind the front door of one of the houses at Amara West, possibly a cache of useful tools.

The most numerous paint-related finds from Amara West are ceramic palettes that hold paint. These palettes are also known from other ancient Egyptian sites, thus it seems that this was common practice.[20] Ceramic sherds would have been easy to obtain, and may even have been created for the purpose by deliberate breakage. The palettes function better when damp because it prevents the water soaking straight into them when it is added to the pigment powder, so they may have been soaked in water before use.

Experimentation with the application of paint led to the conclusion that a paintbrush would have been a necessary item, and many brushes are known from ancient Egypt that suggest these were

20 Pagès-Camagna and Raue, "Coloured Materials Used in Elephantine"; Kemp and Stevens, *Busy Lives at Amarna*.

Figure 5. Ancient Egyptian paintbrush dating to the New Kingdom. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.

commonly used items, for example Metropolitan Museum of Art 17.190.1967 (fig. 5), said to be made of "palm fibres." Experimentation was undertaken with various local plant resources to attempt to manufacture a paintbrush. The most success was had with the fruit bearing branches of the date palm. These can be snapped into shorter lengths, and are made up of many thin strands that naturally hold together well, but at the broken end can be beaten with a hammerstone to create bristles. A brush manufactured in this way holds paint well and is easy to manipulate. Many brushes can be made from one branch, and this is one way in which similar paintbrushes may have been made by the people of Amara West. Regardless of the origin of the fibres, the process highlights the importance of preparation of the brushes before the use of paint. My interviews with modern residents suggested that brushes based on animal parts might also have been an option. Again, these would have taken some preparation, for example the removal of a tail, or acquiring a piece of skin with wool attached after an animal had been slaughtered. Soft tissue animal products would be very unlikely to survive in the archaeological record.

To create paint, pigments were ground on a grinding stone similar in size to those most commonly found at Amara West. Grinding the raw pigments to create pigment powders initially seems to be a simple task, but there are some important considerations. The location chosen for the grinding is important, even in a light breeze the pigment powders will blow away, wasting all the effort that has gone into collecting and grinding the pigment. A sheltered area is best, or a very still day. On a small grindstone (as is typical at Amara West), only a small amount of pigment can be ground at one time. If

Figure 6. Grinding red ochre on a small grindstone. Left — Piece of red ochre to be ground. Right — after grinding, pigment has spilled onto the floor and there is no working space left on the grindstone.

more pigment is added the powder starts falling off the edge of the grindstone, and it becomes impossible to achieve a good particle size because the build-up of powder prevents the particles from being crushed between the grindstone and the hammerstone. Therefore, the powdered pigment has to be regularly decanted to another vessel if any sizeable amount is to be ground (fig. 6). There is a strong sensory experience to grinding. The choice of hammerstone is based on how the stone fits in the hand, how the fingers curl around it, and how the weight feels when it is brought down. The arm muscle quickly begins to ache, and small injuries to the grinding hand would have been hard to avoid.

Modern interviewees said that jirls learnt to plaster and paint from their mothers by joining in with the plastering and painting process from their early teens. We could imagine the grinding of pigments to form part of a learning process for younger members of the family or neighbourhood, perhaps taking turns at grinding, perhaps just watching and listening. This may have been the time that memories were passed on, both collective memories that describe the ways in which paint must be prepared, and why, and more personal ones of previous times that paint has been made, the people that made it, and what happened to them. In this way, the painting of the houses could be used as a community event, using the painting activity as an opportunity to share both the physical activity and the memories associated with it. Having that communal memory, and connecting the decoration of the house to it, transforms that house into a home that is deeply embedded in a neighbourhood community.

During the process of gathering tools, mixing, and painting, people would have been unavailable to perform their normal tasks, so the whole process may have been accomplished in a group, with one or more people painting and others forming a support network, preparing food, looking after children and animals and perhaps taking part as a social event. Painting may have taken place at particular life events or particular times of year and the painting

process could have been integrated with these celebrations. The interviews indicated that it was desirable to schedule redecoration of the house around important events, even if this did not always transpire in reality.

The experiential study has demonstrated that the preparation of paints and the execution of painting was not a simple process. Many materials had to be gathered, traded, manufactured, and processed, taking time, effort, and planning. There would have been many people involved, both directly and tangentially, and therefore social interactions. The performance of all these actions would have been culturally regulated, including gestures, songs, timings, and the status of the actors within the society. This has also been noted in the decoration of the ancient site of Çatalhöyük in Turkey.[21] Scholars have also examined how domestic activities serve as a cornerstone for social relationships in the Andes.[22] Peripheral objects and tasks to the ones focused on here probably included cooking food (requiring food, pots, fire, utensils), travelling by donkey or boat, making bags or baskets, producing items to trade, meeting and trading with other people, collecting water, minding animals and children, and cleaning. The task of painting was part of a much wider interconnected taskscape, the "spatiotemporal layout of activity at a site."[23]

Narratives

The archaeological evidence, information gathered from interviews, and experience of collecting materials and making paint have been combined to create a fictional passage which imagines what the ancient experience of paint creation may have been. To a certain extent, all archaeology is storytelling, since the "truth" can never be known for certain; all archaeological reporting uses a narrative form of some sort, some of which have become institutionalised and are therefore hardly recognised as storytelling.[24] The aim of this fictional section is to demonstrate how important the intangible aspects of the production of paint may have been to its creation, and to add life to the archaeological record, to "people the past."[25]

> I got up earlier than usual this morning because today we are going to fetch paint-rock from the pit in the desert and we need to leave

21 Çamurcuoğlu, *The Wall Paintings of Çatalhöyük (Turkey)*, pp. 240-246.
22 Leinaweaver, "Raising the roof in the transnational Andes."
23 Ingold, "Taking taskscape to task," pp. 26; Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape."
24 Joyce, "Introducing the First Voice"; Majewski, "We Are All Storytellers"; Pluciennik, "Archaeological Narratives and Other Ways of Telling."
25 Mickel, "Archaeologists as Authors and the Stories of Sites"; Tringham, "Households with Faces."

before the sun rises. The younger children are staying with my sister, but I'm taking the older two with me, and it's Menet's first time. She's excited and gets up without complaining, despite the early morning chill. We each take a cloak and then head to the edge of the village where we are meeting Waset with the donkey and her children. Yesterday we filled a waterskin and put some bread aside, and now we tie all this plus several empty baskets onto the donkey, and as the light touches the sky we set off towards the cemetery. In the cemetery we stop for a while to visit our ancestors and leave small food offerings. The children run around chasing each other. We pass the boulders that mark the edge of our daily surroundings and look out into the desert. It's important to start the journey facing the right direction so we take a couple of minutes to discuss the landmarks we need to notice, and then we set off into the desert. As we walk on, the wind picks up and we all wrap our heads in our cloaks to keep the sand out of our eyes and ears. I think about the previous journeys I have made to fetch paint-rock and the events that have led to these painting days: marriage, a new house, a new baby. This journey is to collect paint-rock for the coming festival. We also thought it was a good time to take the older children to the desert pit to show them the paint-rock and how they will have to collect their own painting materials when their turn comes. As we reach the place the wind dies down and we can talk again. The children look around for rocks to use as shovels, and we find some that were used last time and left in a pile at the side of the pit. We sit to eat a little and drink some water while we tell stories of the last trip, who was there, and where we dug. Then we point to where we need to dig. The youngest digs first and fills a basket with the chunks of coloured rock. There are songs to sing while we dig, which remind us of the other times, and of the people who were here with us. Now it is getting hot and digging is hard work, we chide the children and the songs help us finish the work. When we have filled all of the containers, we sit again, and now the flies have come out and they buzz around us. We head back with the sun getting hotter and hotter and pull our cloaks over our heads. There is no wind at all and we can all talk easily. We point out landmarks we need to know to find our way across the desert. Eventually we can see the pyramids in the cemetery. They grow larger on the horizon and then I can hear the workmen in the cemetery swearing and joking and swinging their hammers. We wearily head into the village, and people greet us on our return. They call out to us or stop for a chat. Some people who couldn't come on the journey ask if they can have some of the paint-rock in return for a contribution to the party.

I have gathered the rocks and tree gum, and the day has come when the rock must be ground to a powder. It will take a whole day, so I have asked the neighbours on both sides to join me, and my sister is here too. We will take turns grinding the powder, watching the children, and cooking. Because we have gathered, we are making some special food. I remember my mother making the paint for my sister's house and the smells of the stew she made, and the taste of the special breads. I suggest we make these foods and my sister agrees but the others have their own special foods that they want to make, so we end up with a lot of food! We find a quiet, sheltered corner of the house to grind the rock, where the wind won't reach it, and as we finish each grind, we place the powder into the basket my mother gave to me for holding the powder. We each grind until the ache in our hand becomes unbearable, then the next person takes a turn. As we work alongside each other we chat and sing songs that remind us of other times when we have been grinding paint and the events that led to those times and the people involved. People passing the doorway can smell our food and come in to say hello and talk about the reason for the paint and to taste the food. We give each visitor a bread to take with them. Some of them share their memories of special food with us and some give us advice on the grinding, and how much plant gum to add. Menet sits by me as I grind and asks questions. After she has watched for a while she asks to take a turn. I show her how to hold the hammerstone, the amount of rock to use, and the correct way to pound the rock. It quickly starts to hurt her hand so I send her to take water to the animals. When the basket is full, we can stop grinding. We sing a song of celebration and relief, cover the basket, and put the ground rock aside for another day.

I start the painting by applying a layer of white plaster to the whole wall. It is thick so I use my hand. I mix the plaster with some water and plant gum in a large pot and stir it with my hand, then I take a lump and smear it onto the mudbrick wall. I continue until the whole wall is covered, and there are splashes of white plaster over the floor and over me too. My oldest daughter helps me with the lower sections of the wall; it's her first time so she makes a mess but I quickly smooth it over. This way of applying the plaster takes practice to get it smooth enough to paint on. It doesn't take long to cover the whole wall. Then we leave it to dry while going about our normal tasks. The whole house smells damp while it is drying and I light the fire earlier than normal in the evening to get rid of the damp feeling. After two days I am sure it is dry and we can paint the colour. I have prepared red and yellow ground rock, and some charcoal that I ground to make black. Blue is not for us. So I'll stick

with the normal colours. My husband mixes the ground charcoal with a little water in a piece of broken pot and paints a thin line of black around the wall. I mix red and water and paint the area above the line. He uses a brush we made from palm last time we dried the palm branches; mine is a bigger brush, made with grasses from the river bank that I gathered when the moon was small and then dried on the roof until the moon was full again. When we are done, we invite the family over to admire our work and we share food that they have brought with them. We sing together and play music. We go to bed late, but before we go to sleep, we speak to our ancestors and ask that all will be well in this house now we have painted the walls.

For the first few days after the painting, every time I enter the room I am again surprised at the change in colour and the way it makes the room feel different from before. Then after a while I get used to it. Menet says it makes her shy of her elders, the room feels more formal. When neighbours come into the room they behave differently from before, they do not sit so casually on the floor but stay by the doorway and wait to be invited in. But I remember how this goes; the paint is fresh and this will last for a little while, yet soon they will be back to their normal selves and gradually the paint will crack and the room will still feel different from before, but not so newly painted. My husband is pleased with the effect the paint has had. Soon it will be somebody else's turn and we will have the chance to help them and share their food.

Conclusion

Combining archaeological evidence, interviews of the current inhabitants of the area, and a re-creation of painting materials, allowed the experiences and activities of ancient people to be imagined. The re-creation highlighted the wide range of tasks that would have surrounded the creation and application of paint, and how this would have been embedded in the landscape, and the lives of the ancient people. Each task had associations with others (for example, pottery used for palettes), that were interconnected across a taskscape. The creation of paint should not be viewed as an isolated event, but rather as one of many processes that were taking place within the village that each impacted on the other, and on the lives of the people around it, and their associates, their relationships, and their memories. The application of paint to a house individualises the space to make it unique to the people who live there, and communicates to others in the neighbourhood the social standing and aspirations of the family. Through this communication, the

family situates themselves in the community. The way a house is laid out and decorated could be referred to as a homescape, the way the space is manipulated by the addition of colour (and other elements) to curate the house into a home within a community.

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A House Against Housing: Post-Displacement Nubian Domesticity

Menna Agha

The Nubians and their houses faced multiple displacements triggered by hydropower projects, starting with the Aswan Low Dam in 1902 (later raised in 1912 and 1933).[1] The impact of the dam development resulted in the loss of arable land, resources, and power within the Nubian house. Economic dispossession forced Nubian men to migrate to urban centers for wage labour, leaving the Nubian house to be managed by women. The 1933 raising of the dam caused further devastation, flooding villages and prompting more labour migration. The Nubian house confronted an environmental catastrophe due to irresponsible developments. Despite the state offering a meager amount to replace the houses lost, the Nubian community rallied together, rebuilding their villages in what Hassan Fathy termed "A Miracle in Architecture."[2] The Nubian house exhibited resilience, with all houses reconstructed in twelve months, each unique and more beautiful than the other, reflecting the community-based and emotionally-driven building regime.

It is important to the larger pushback against epistemic violence and the depoliticizing language of "development" to investigate and explain the wealth that was lost after displacement, and to do so, I look into modes of epistemic violence by way of housing in the resettlement villages. The state-built housing project was dubbed New Nubia by the state, but Nubians refer to it unfavorably as *"Al Tahgīr,"* meaning "place of displacement."[3] In this text, I look at the Nubian house from inside the house, through memories, and rely on stories embedded within the Nubian collective consciousness. In this text, I use the term Old Nubia to refer to Nubian land before 1963

1 Waterbury, *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley.*
2 El-Hakim *Nubian Architecture,* p. iv.
3 On the term "New Nubia," see Fernea and Gerster, *Nubians in Egypt.*

and use the terms resettlement villages, settlements, and *tahgeer* to refer to the current site of resettlement near Aswan.

Planning without Nubians

New Nubia, as the state names it, or *tahgeer* as Nubians refer to it, is a large housing project (approximately 12,000 units) that was designed as a substitute "habitat" for residents of Nubian lands flooded during the construction of the High Dam, was later criticized for replicating the economic habitat of the old community which alienated Nubians.[4] The state produced the plan under the supervision of The Joint Committee for Nubian Resettlement, established in April 1961.[5] The planning concept claimed to take a motto of "centralization in planning and decentralization in implementation" to reconcile central planning and community participation.[6]

However, the planning was hastily finalized and claimed to be "a replica of the original housing schemes with a socialist tinge," which is visibility contradicted by comparing the plans of Old Nubia and those of *tahgeer*.[7] Notably, the plans were not based on substantial sociological or anthropological studies, as they were finalized before the Ethnographic survey on Nubia concluded its duties.[8] The Ethnographic survey, which was first conceived in 1960, was not directed to offer spatial information about Nubian houses.[9] Instead, it had a clear task of providing information to assist the Egyptian government in its efforts; the project helped the state learn how to deal with Nubians but not the other way around.[10] The research was tasked with uncovering tactical problems, part of which was to study the social organization and cultural traditions of the three ethnic sub-divisions of Egyptian Nubia, each with its own linguistic and cultural characteristics.

The government then invited locals to show them models of their then-future homes, as a part of a participatory agenda. However, this was done later in the process when most of the design decisions had already been made. As documented in the official reports, the planning process was based on modern urban planning methodologies.[11] The rectangular planning pattern, the minimalist dwelling units, the centralized and optimized surveys,

4 Wahdan, "Planning Imploded."
5 Serageldin, "Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980."
6 Ibid, p. 95.
7 Ghabbour, "Involuntary Resettlement in Development Projects."
8 Hopkins and Mehanna, *Nubian Encounters*.
9 Fernea, "The Ethnological Survey of Egyptian Nubia."
10 Hopkins and Mehanna, *Nubian Encounters*.
11 Serageldin, "Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980."

and the greater focus on productivity were all features in planning the new Nubian settlements. Nubian women were excluded from decision-making, which is evident in the Egyptian government's documentation, which kept lists of locals invited. They were all men, and this rendered the process gender biased.

"We [the women] did not speak Arabic, and they [the interviewers] did not speak Nubian. They spoke only to the Omda [mayor] and some men; then the men told us our houses would drown; they also said we would go to a new Qustul, we would have hospitals and schools and plenty of lands (sarcastically), look around you, we were fooled," as Anna Zolihka said (Qustul interviews, 28 December 2016: In this specific trip, my great aunt Zolikha Sakina — Zulikha, daughter of Sakina, since this is a matrilineal society — was telling stories and conditions of displacement, especially from the point of view of Nubian women).

The government operated a gender-exclusive assignment, with most officials being men, who dealt mostly with Nubian men. This was justified by the claim that few Nubian women spoke Arabic.[12] Consequently, most states offered polls and community invitations only to men, and compensation was distributed to the men. The flaws in the state system that excluded women from much of the wealth and the complicity of some Nubian men with said system for material gains all rendered the process unjust.

The typical resettlement village in New Nubia had a modern linear grid and a linear orientation for residential buildings, with a concentration of building plots surrounded by agricultural land. The linear grid was often dominated by the main street, with services such as a mosque, commercial center, school, sports center, and post office in the heart of this area. The design was often referred to as unimaginative due to its simple form and synthetic spaces that reappropriated elements of Nubian architecture but failed to offer the spatial quality of our ancestral land.[13]

The layout of a typical settlement is similar to plans produced by the early modernist schools. It was also affected by the 1930 and 1940 movements of the "modern Egyptian village" that aimed to replace the existing village with a gridded one to introduce the Egyptian peasant to order and culture.[14] Large-scale housing projects in cases of development-induced displacement and resettlement have been a topic of concern and debate within the field of urban development and social sciences. The challenges and problems associated with such projects have been well-documented in academic literature.

12 Fernea and Kennedy, "Initial Adaptations to Resettlement."
13 On the unimaginative design, see Serageldin, "Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980"; Ghabbour, "Involuntary Resettlement in Development Projects."
14 Mitchell, *Rule of Experts,* p. 195.

Several key issues arise in the context of large-scale housing projects for development-induced displacement and resettlement, including social disruption, loss of livelihoods, inadequate compensation, and lack of community participation in the resettlement process.

After resettlement, dwelling units were distributed to families according to their size, thus discounting spatial logic and severing social contracts. Residents recalled that their first encounter with the settlement was filled with disappointment: the modern paradise they were promised was just an incomplete housing project in the desert. But even those housed in the state-built dwelling units were roofless and doorless, so the Nubian people had to invest time and resources into building their own houses. During that time, the society came together to survive.

The process of resettlement in new houses did not flow smoothly, according to most literature.[15] The housing units and their facilities were not complete at the time of the move. As Saida, a 78-year-old woman in Qustul, said: "When we first arrived here, there was a house for one family and no house for five others, and if one received one, it would have no roof and windows" (Qustul interviews, 28 December 2016).

Building Houses Against Housing

American anthropologists Fernea and Kennedy were responsible for the ethnographic survey in Nubia during and after the displacement.[16] They noted the vast construction efforts in Nubian displacement villages: "There is scarcely a neighborhood in New Nubia in which some houses have not been radically altered through the mounting of China plates above the doors, as in Old Nubia, and by plastering the exterior with mud to create a facade upon which traditional Nubian designs may be painted."[17]

The creation of the house in the "Nubian way" was crucial to Nubians; therefore, they often paid for an expensive remodeling of the new settlement. "Some house-owners have spent as much as 300 EGP in their efforts to bring the new homes into conformity with traditional Nubian standards." This is an astounding amount of money, knowing that in 1960, Egyptian per capita income was 52.4 EGP per year. The government's compensation for their lost houses

15 Allen, *Nubians and Development;* Fahim, "Community-Health Aspects of the Nubian Resettlement in Egypt"; Fernea and Kennedy, "Initial Adaptations to Resettlement"; Ghabbour, "Involuntary Resettlement in Development Projects"; Hopkins and Mehanna, *Nubian Encounters;* Mahgoub, "The Nubian Experience"; Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians;* Serageldin, "Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980"; Tadros, "The Human Aspects of Rural Resettlement Schemes in Egypt"; Tibe, "Nubian Land Rights."

16 Fernea and Kennedy, "Initial Adaptations to Resettlement."

17 Fernea and Kennedy, "Initial Adaptations to Resettlement," p. 351.

was 10 pounds per house. As Fernea mentions, cash compensations were given to men and quickly spent, which meant the burden fell on Nubian women who had to sell their coveted gold.[18] My grand aunt said: "We had to sell our gold in Kom Ombo to make this [points to the dwelling unit] a proper house."

Nubians have exhibited their dissatisfaction with their newly built environment both verbally, in my interviews, and in the renovations they implemented to make the state-built dwelling units liveable. They have reappropriated the state-built dwellings and refurbished them; Nubian women have made the *Mastaba,* a bench attached to the home, as they did in their old villages.[19] Some Nubians have opted to build a house themselves. Often referred to *ahali* (people-built) houses, they are similar in design and spatial order to the old Nubian houses, yet they had to redefine their relationship with the outside. Nonetheless, Nubian houses retained the tradition of unlocked doors even in the state-built dwellings with their built-in door lock; Nubians drilled a hole in their doors to ensure accessibility. Growing up, I remember that our door would open after three polite knocks, and someone would come in without being told to enter. The accessibility of the house and people's desire to access it were matters of family pride: "Our house is always full," as my grandmother used to say.

Historically, the everyday lives of Nubian women were integrated within the social sphere, as was the house. The average surface area of Nubian houses, before resettlement, ranged from 500 to 2,000 square meters, and it is common to find a 1,600 square meter unit that is registered as the residence of four or five people.[20] The state dwelling units offered much smaller surface areas, moving all social encounters, such as weddings and conflict councils, to formally designated public spaces. Dwelling units in the current settlement are less than 10% of the average Nubian house as the state-offered dwellings varied from 100 to 220 square meters, which resulted in two separate spheres — one public and one private.[21]

My grandmother's stories often deal with the house as the site of everyday life; she expects me to automatically set the events in her story in a house unless otherwise told. A house is a place where people meet, eat, sort their crops, and divide their shares. The house in my grandmothers' stories has the ability to transform into a courthouse, a warehouse, and a large-scale kitchen, which explains the large surface areas of traditional Nubian houses in

18 Fernea, "The Ethnological Survey of Egyptian Nubia."
19 Fernea and Kennedy, "Initial Adaptations to Resettlement."
20 On average surface area of Nubian houses before resettlement, see El-Hakim, *Nubian Architecture.*
21 On the size, see Serageldin, "Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980."

relation to the number of their occupants, unlike the units designed by the Egyptian state in the resettlement village. The Nubian house was never a mere dwelling. The state-built houses are modernist in design, offering the minimum requirements for a human being — rooms to sleep in, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The units were built around a courtyard as the state architects claimed to draw inspiration from traditional Nubian houses.[22] The courtyard was too small in scale to fulfil its social role in incubating social life or its environmental role in cooling and ventilating the house.[23] The architecture of the dwellings limited the Nubian house and its role in social, economic, and political functions and, therefore, made the Nubian house a dispossessed Nubian institution, consequently excluding women from the public sphere and destroying the Nubian household as a cultural institution and its constitutive power. In this case, the very existence of public space is an ontological intrusion and an infringement on the indigenous spatial order, an order in which the house and its women were politically involved.

Emotional Place-Making

In the early 1970s, a remarkable story unfolds against the backdrop of the massive displacement of the Nubian community from their ancestral lands in Old Nubia due to hydropower projects. It centers around Sakina Abaya, a Nubian woman who became a symbol of resilience, emotional placemaking, and community empowerment in the face of upheaval. A few years after the move from Old Nubia, there was a surge in construction activities by displaced Nubians. Four of Sakina Abaya's children were in Qustul during the state-operated census before the resettlement; the fifth was studying in Khartoum with his family and was not issued a house (Cairo interviews, 12 February 2017: Notes of my uncle, remembering how housing was distributed, commissioned, and built in the early days of displacement).

The construction of Sakina's son's house began; he states: "She had commissioned a master mason with the foundation work, as we did not understand the soil of this place [new settlement]." He continues:

> She sat there, in a close distance under the shade while we started working with the master mason, she brought food and a tea making kit every day, she woke us up, came with us, and left with us.

22 Serageldin, "Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980."

23 Bayoumi, "Nubian Vernacular Architecture and Contemporary Aswan Buildings' Enhancement."

Then, I asked: "Who decided the division of the house?" He answered:

> She did, she would tell us to get this wall to end here, or leave a place for windows here.

He continues:

> She was a boss, she understood building and was never fooled by commissioned workers. Actually, they all respected her because she gave them food and made them tea whenever they wanted.

Sakina Abaya initiated the building process by invoking the love and respect of her grandchildren that she garnered over years of caring for them; she sustained the construction process from beginning to end by performing a practice of care as she sat there with the workers all day making tea, she also choreographed the social characteristics of the house from her position. Sakina Abaya acted as their building supervisor and caregiver. Sakina Abaya died when I was around nine years old, but she was surrounded by stories of the exquisite skill with which she generated social, emotional, and material capital. With the same method, she built three houses for her family, farmed their land, and planted numerous palm trees, from which we eat daily to this day.

Within the shadow economy of Qustul, I found an effective micro-financing network. A person in financial need can initiate a financing cycle, a *jamʿīyya,* in which he or she can ask trusted persons, mostly women, who are willing and able to join a pool of women by paying a cyclic contribution (monthly/weekly/bi-monthly/etc.).[24] When they find a pool that suits their economic need, the person and the *jamʿīyya* agree on a time frame, and a person responsible for managing the pool (banker) is assigned. This person is often a trusted woman. The banker/manager is responsible for the collection and the allocation of funds in a timely manner (e.g., each month); she is also responsible for conducting a random draw to decide the succession of payment to participants. Usually, need trumps the random draw; for instance, if the participants agree among each other — under the banker's coordination — that those in pressing need are paid first. People who are financially comfortable join these co-ops as it is a social honor and duty; they often get paid last.

It is the poor people's bank "where money is not idle for long but changes hands rapidly, satisfying both consumption and produc-

24 Habbob, "Community Sharing"; Jennings, *The Nubians of West Aswan.*

Figure 1.
The house built by Sakina Abaya in Qustul.

tion needs."[25] Moreover, the trade in this bank is not only in money; there is also an exchange of care and honor. Habbob tells the story of Fatom Jaara, a woman in her eighties who has been managing a *jamʿīyya* since 1970 in the displaced village of Thomas Wa Afia, his Nubian village, which is now located in Esna, 55 kilometers south of Luxor.[26] In the 1970s, her participants used to pay 0.25 EGP per month. Fatom Jaara's *jamʿīyya* is one of the many old banks that can be found in all displacement villages, whose inhabitants have no relations with formalized or big banks, which helped the funding of buildings, weddings, travel, school supplies, and more.

In this exploration of Sakina Abaya's building story and the *jamʿīyya* network, I remember and honor the emotional labor that builds our Nubian houses, communal bonds, and the profound connection between people and the places they create, even in the face of forced displacement. It underscores the notion that places are not merely physical entities but also vessels of emotion, memory, and identity, shaped by those who inhabit and care for them. As we journey through these narratives, we gain insight into the intricate web of emotions, values, and traditions that define Nubian placemaking, even in the most challenging circumstances.

25 Bouman, "Indigenous Savings and Credit Societies in the Developing World."
26 Habbob, "Community Sharing."

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Nubian Architectural and Environmental Features Before and After Displacement: The Model of the Village Tūmās wa ʿĀfya

Maher Habbob

The Nubians are an ethnic group living for centuries in old Nubia. For a long time, the Nubians ruled kingdoms and created an empire. Many years later, because of the colonial settings and the division of Egypt and Sudan, Nubia was divided into two main regions: Upper Nubia (the Sudanese Nubia), and Lower Nubia (The Egyptian Nubia), which stretched along a 320-kilometer sector of the Nile Valley between Aswan and Adindan that used to connect Egypt with Sudan. The Nubian valley is mostly very narrow, lined with mountain slopes, steep above the right bank. At the time of resettlement in the early 1960s, an estimated 50,000 Nubians lived in thirty-nine villages, divided into three basic residential areas, settled by three main groups, Kunūz, Arabs, and Fadija. Their main economic activities were based on agriculture largely in their original homeland.

As overseers of a rich social legacy, Nubians preserved a special lifestyle. Their towns were spots of home and focused on social connections, well established in family ties, ancestral traditions, and the atmosphere of the local area. The engineering of their homes, which were built neighborhood materials, such as mud brick, gave an impression of their association with the land and demonstrated their cleverness. The relocation and resettlement process during the 1960s upset this customary way of life, moving the Nubians to adjust to new conditions while endeavoring to keep up with their social character.

The northernmost of these groups, formerly living in the area between Aswan and As-Sebua, are the Kunūz. Their close relatives in the southernmost Egyptian Nubia, located between Korosko and Adendan, are the Fadijja, who often call themselves "Nūbi." Between these two groups (the Kunūz and Nūbi), various Nubian Arab tribes settled down in the fourteenth century CE along a thirty-kilometer stretch of the Nile Valley lined with hills on the right bank, between Wadi el Arab and as-Singari. This settlement cut the Kunūz off from the Fadijja. Another ethnic group, the Ababda, originally nomads of the Eastern Desert also gradually began settling down, recently in some Kunūz villages and Arab villages.

The different settlement examples of these gatherings made rich embroidery of societies in Nubia. Each gathering contributed its practices, dialects, and customs, yet they shared other components, particularly a profound association with the Nile, which supported their lifestyle. The Nile was a wellspring of water as well as the core of horticultural practices, supporting a scope of harvests that were crucial for their economy. Over the long run, this mixing of various Nubian and Bedouin backgrounds encouraged an extraordinary social character that survived outside impacts, including dislodging. Today, the tradition of this assorted legacy remains critical, giving us an understanding of the flexibility and versatility of Nubian culture.

A house (*nōg*) is more than a physical object for the Nubians. Feeling at home was not questioned by the Nubians before the resettlement. The loss of these homes was a traumatic experience for many Nubians. For their purposes, a house is profoundly imbued with social importance and stands as an image of legacy and personality. Each home addresses the heredity of a family, and is designed for shelter as well as for protecting customs and building up local area bonds. Worked with remarkable compositional components to suit the Nubian way of life, these homes were valued spaces where day-to-day existence, festivities, and family customs unfurled. The deficiency of these homes was a horrendous encounter for some Nubians, as the resettlement evacuated them truly as well as cut off the association with these social and hereditary spaces, leaving a void that new residences couldn't fill.

Familiarity with the house, its history, and knowledge about its parts and surroundings facilitated a sense of belonging and attachment to the house. Ownership of the house was not only physical, but it was emotional and cultural as well. The theme of control was important in transforming the house into a home. It ensured safety and security through privacy. This was achieved by controlling what was communicated to others as well as controlling

access and boundaries. The meanings communicated by different parts of the house, rooms, furniture, and decorations, were all understood by the inhabitants and by the community at large. The layout and orientation of each space within the home were chosen with purpose, ensuring that the architecture reflected and honored the cultural values of the family within.

The newly-built resettlement villages of the 1960s took the same names as the former ones, but the names of the hamlets (*nujūʿ*) were discontinued. These *nujūʿ* were essential to the Nubian social structure, as each hamlet was typically inhabited by extended families or clan members. The discontinuation of these hamlet names, which held significant cultural value, represented a loss of identity for many Nubians. In Old Nubia, the *nujūʿ* were more than just geographical locations; they were markers of lineage, community, and shared history. In the resettlement villages, however, this intricate social fabric was disrupted, as families were grouped based on household size rather than kinship. Without the hamlet names, the sense of belonging and continuity with past generations was diminished, making the transition to the new settlements even more challenging.

The old *nujūʿ* were based on family and clan relationships. Each *najaʿ* was distinguished from the others. Inhabitants of the *nujūʿ* were mostly members of the same clan. In the resettlement villages, the government planners ignored this important cultural feature. The street layouts in the resettlement villages are organized based on house sizes: rows of adjacent houses all had the same number of rooms. Hence Nubian families ended up with neighbors who shared not family relationships but family size.

This paper compares traditional old Nubian houses before relocation and the new governmental dwellings built for them following their forced displacement. I also find it necessary to situate the relevant events and developments in two broader contexts:

a) the relevant aspects of Nubian culture that pertain to the meaning of home, kinship, and community; and
b) the specific history of Nubian resettlement.

In my opinion and experience, this two-fold contextualization serves its purposes best if it is accompanied by a synopsis of the governmental resettlement policies, plans, and difficult interactions between government officials and Nubians. This synopsis is of course limited, due to the space constraints of this paper.

The Nubian settlements known as *nawāhi* (villages) had several unique characteristics, in terms of settlement patterns and housing

after 1902. The reservoir was completed in 1902 and the completion of the construction of the old Aswan dam and its elevation took place in 1912 and 1933. These changes to the landscape disrupted ancestral settlement patterns and housing, albeit differently depending upon the settlement. I describe the most important characteristics below.

Before the construction of the dam, nonetheless, all Nubian *nawāhi* firmly looked like the principal design. The network design, with its organized lines of homes, represented the profound association of the Nubian nation to the Nile, which was integral to their lifestyle. This plan not only took into consideration the proficient utilization of room on the flatlands but also cultivated a feeling of public living. As families resided one next to the other, every family fostered a harmonious day-to-day existence interlaced with that of their neighbors. The efficient design mirrored the solidarity and relationships among individuals, and it gave a dependable system for overseeing assets, land, and the connections that supported their networks. After resettlement, nonetheless, these customary arrangements were upset, supplanting a natural and socially established structure with a more unbending plan that did not completely resonate with the Nubian lifestyle.

There were two types of settlement patterns in Old Nubia:

1. the grid pattern that is usually found in the southern part of Nubia on flat lands where dwellings were organized in rows parallel to the Nile; and
2. the free pattern that was usually found in northern Nubia where the settlements stood mostly on hills leaving the flat lands for agriculture.

But, before the dam, all Nubian *nawāḥi* followed the grid pattern.

Tūmās wa ʿĀfya

The old village of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya was located 220 kilometers upstream of Aswan, and next to the village of Derr, on the west bank of the river. Derr was the capital of Lower Nubia, and the headquarters of the Kāshifs who were nineteenth-century Nubian "governors." Its name, Tūmās wa ʿĀfya, was derived from a Nubian phrase meaning "son good," i.e., "good son." It epitomized the well-established social upsides of family honor and consideration in the local area. This town was among the numerous in Nubia that held huge verifiable and social significance. The place of Derr as the capital further elevated what remained of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya. Such villages, with their solid familial associations, confronted

significant misfortune with resettlement, as the uprooting eliminated individuals from their genealogical terrains as well as disturbed the social texture of their networks.

Tūmās wa ʿĀfya consisted of eight major hamlets: Sāb, Mansour, Ambaray, Himerīye, Mārya, Moradāb, Oba, and ʿĀfya. Each of these consisted of smaller *nujūʿ*. The two major *nujūʿ* were Oba and ʿĀfya. Oba consisted of Oba, Bahjōra, Nejarīye, and Karkar, while ʿĀfya consisted of Fāshir, Shibakīye, Dinabe, Fūdabe, Shagīg, Arab Hille, Hinesabe, Jelegāb, and Khērēn.

Tūmās wa ʿĀfya was not affected by the construction of the old Aswan reservoir in 1902 or by its first heightening in 1912. But by its second heightening in 1933, the government divided the Nubian villages according to the following classification:

1. villages that flooded temporarily during the closing of the reservoir gates but when the gates reopened, and the reservoir water level went down, people were able to plant for a shorter period; and
2. villages that flooded permanently and lost any possibility for future farming.

In the first category, government compensation was (in principle) paid for palm trees and houses, while in the second category compensation was for palm trees, houses, and farmland.

As a result of the second heightening of the Old Aswan reservoir, the government decided in 1933 to expropriate all the territory under 122 meters above sea level. The government issued Act No. 6 of 1933 which excluded from the final expropriation some villages that were located on high lands. This Act was specifically designed to undermine the opportunity for Nubians to file claims against the state or government. They were deprived of the right to contest and sue the authorities, which was permitted under the other existing laws at that time. This move contributed to the instability of Nubian rights, as Nubian communities found themselves trapped between the legal challenges that prevented them from defending their rights and interests in the face of government policies regarding land expropriation.

These villages were deemed to be partly safe from flooding for part of the year, which might be enough to plant and cultivate for a few months. The owners of these lands received compensation for the part of the year in which they could not farm due to flooding. That compensation equaled half of the assessed value of their land. The land thus partly compensated remained, legally speaking, in the ownership of its previous owners. Tūmās wa ʿĀfya was one of

Figure 1.
In 1933, seven families from Tūmās wa ʿĀfya moved to Edfu.

the villages that experienced this situation. As we shall see, this had some important consequences for how the resettlement events unfolded.

About seven families from the hamlet of Moradāb decided to resettle north about 270 km to Beheera and Ridasiya (urbanized Rideesiye) in Edfu instead of rebuilding on higher grounds in the old location (figure 1).

In response to complaints from villagers to the effect that they could not benefit even partially from their flooded farmlands, the government issued a decision in July 1942 to expropriate all the farmland of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya and to pay the remaining half of the compensation of the affected lands. As a reaction to this, all landowners in Tūmās wa ʿĀfya withdrew their previous complaint and demanded instead that the government either reassess the value of their lands or give the affected owners comparable properties in other locations unaffected by the heightening of the reservoir.

In 1951 the government approved the expropriation of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya and allocated an area of 8,000 *feddans* near Esna to be sold to the affected people.

From that moment, the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya were somehow assumed by some officials to be connected to Esna, although they had not, at that time, left their homeland.

Officially, those people owned "unseen" agricultural lands in Esna. The government issued a decree in 1954 to expropriate their land in the old site of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya. In January 1954, the government

held the equivalent of 30% of the compensation due to the affected people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya as a deposit for land reclamation which, as promised, would be sold to them in the Esna region. However, the operations were put on hold in 1959, for the government decided to stop such sales because by that time plans to build the High Dam were firmed up. Although the government had, as mentioned above, withheld 30% of the compensation, it did not start building the infrastructure needed for land reclamation.

The 8,000 *feddans* near Esna came with specific terms that were not always made clear to the affected Nubian families. These documents highlight the sense of uncertainty and confusion felt by many as they navigated this forced sale of land. While the government offered this land as compensation, families were often faced with bureaucratic challenges that made the acquisition process lengthy and complex. Furthermore, there were financial implications attached to the land allocation, which required the Nubian families to pay for property that was ostensibly meant to replace their lost homes. This added burden underscored the ongoing struggle for fair and adequate compensation and the challenges the Nubians encountered in securing a new foundation for their displaced communities.

Tūmās wa ʿĀfya's Traditional Housing

The houses were built in the form of a rectangle with an area roughly from 200 to 1000 square meters, depending on the site and topography. Many factors have affected the design of the old Nubian houses, such as the climatic, geographical, and the social needs.

The standard house layout included the following components:

The Main Entrance:
In numerous customary Nubian homes, the primary entry is intended to represent both friendliness and protection. It frequently includes enlivening components, such as complex carvings or painted themes that mirror the family's legacy or status. These decisions about the house plan create an inviting atmosphere at first entry and prompt guests to understand the family's social situation.This cautious meticulousness in the entry region features the significance of family and local area associations, as well as the conventional meaning of the home as a space of solace and regard.

The Maḍyafa:
The *maḍyafa* is more than just a guest room; it holds cultural importance as a place of hospitality and honor. In Nubian homes, guests are treated with the utmost respect, and the *maḍyafa* serves

as a dedicated space for welcoming them. Often, it is decorated with beautiful textiles, traditional wall art, and comfortable seating that reflects Nubian customs. Its location near the main entrance symbolizes the open-hearted nature of Nubian hospitality, while also ensuring that guests can enjoy a private space without disrupting the household's daily activities. The proximity of the *maḍyafa* to the courtyard allows for easy access to the open area, where larger gatherings or shared meals may be hosted under the shade. Additionally, the *maḍyafa* furnishings and décor are often chosen carefully to showcase the family's heritage and pride. Embellished with locally crafted items, such as woven mats and pottery, the room serves as a display of Nubian craftsmanship and artistry. Guests might be offered traditional refreshments, like hibiscus tea or dates, further emphasizing the cultural practices associated with hospitality. In many homes, family photos and ancestral artifacts are displayed, connecting the guests to the lineage and stories of their hosts. This warm and inviting space reflects the Nubian values of generosity, respect, and a strong sense of community.

The Courtyard:
It is an open space in the middle of the house. It is found in all Nubian houses and different areas. It opens to all rooms of the house used for living purposes. It holds a significant environmental and climatic role in addition to the social one.

The Decorations:
The decoration of the Nubian houses is related to the history of the Nubian dwelling. The decoration takes the form of dolls, fans, and veils, in addition to the paste ceramic dishes on the walls.

High Dam and Nubian Resettlement

Before 1963, in both Egypt and Sudan, Nubians lived between the First and Fifth Nile Cataracts in areas of the Nile Valley where floodwater and other types of irrigation were mainly restricted to a narrow fringe of alluvial deposits continually at risk from desert encroachment. Lower Nubia stretched upstream from north of Wadi Halfa as far as Aswan. Unlike the current barren surroundings of Kom Ombo, all of Lower Nubia in 1962 was a starkly beautiful environment. On both sides of the river, desert sands, interspersed with rocky hills, came down to the water's edge. A total of 553 sparsely populated hamlets (*nujūʿ*) spread along the way. According to the 1960 Egyptian census, the total resident Nubian population

was 98,609 and belonged to three distinct ethnic *cum* linguistic groups, two of which spoke Nubian languages.

In this region, the Nubians developed a way of life closely tied to the Nile, which provided water, fertile land, and a means of transportation. Each hamlet, or *najaʿ*, was typically composed of extended family units, forming small, tight-knit communities. The agricultural practices here were adapted to the narrow stretch of fertile land along the riverbanks, where they grew crops such as sorghum, dates, and vegetables, depending on the seasonal flooding. Fishing also played a role in their sustenance. This way of life, however, was vulnerable, with desert sands encroaching on the farmlands and limited access to other resources, leading many Nubian men to migrate for work. The beauty of the landscape was matched by the cultural richness of its people, who maintained vibrant traditions, languages, and a strong sense of identity despite their challenging environment.

First came the Mattokki/Kenzi-speaking Nubians whose seventeen villages extended for approximately 150 kilometers upriver from Aswan. They represented 36% of the total population and were the most seriously affected by the construction of the Old Aswan reservoir. It is worth noting that some of the Kunūz villages close to Aswan had already been forced to relocate three times, moving up to the reservoir's edge or downstream to and below Aswan with each heightening. All their date palms had been destroyed and most of the year all of their agricultural land was inundated. Cultivation was restricted to only a few months each year when the reservoir gates were open. Then, only quick-maturing fodder crops for the few cows, donkeys, and small stock those villagers kept, as vegetables, could be grown.

Despite these hardships, the Kenzi-speaking Nubians maintained a strong connection to their land and traditions, adapting their agricultural practices as much as possible to the changing conditions. Their resilience was evident in their ability to cultivate whatever little land remained available, even as they coped with the annual cycle of flooding and depletion. However, the frequent relocations took a toll on their way of life. Traditional date palm groves, which were integral to both their economy and culture, had been decimated, along with other crops that once thrived on the banks of the Nile. The Kunūz people, whose livelihoods had been so deeply intertwined with their ancestral lands, faced increasing uncertainty and a growing sense of dislocation with each move. The construction of the Old Aswan reservoir marked a turning point in their history, as they struggled to hold onto their identity in the face of relentless environmental and social upheaval.

In some areas, huge dunes encroached into the reservoir. Owing to the lack of income-earning opportunities in the old villages, labor migration rates among men may well have been the highest in the world. Men from these villages frequently left for extended periods to work in cities like Cairo, Alexandria, and Khartoum. This labor migration was not only driven by limited local employment but also by the strong pull of economic opportunities in urban areas. As a result, families often relied on remittances sent home, which became essential for their livelihoods. Over time, this pattern of migration created deep social and economic ties between the Nubian villages and the cities, as well as a significant cultural exchange. While men worked away from home, Nubian women maintained the households, cultivated small plots of land, and preserved traditional customs, which helped keep their culture alive despite these long absences.

Immediately upriver from the last Mattokki/Kenzi-speaking villages, there was a relatively small population (10% of the total Nubian population in 1960) of Arabic speakers whose seven villages edged the reservoir for the next forty kilometers. They will not be further considered in the present analysis. In the next stretch upriver, the Mahas-speaking Fadijja community inhabited approximately twenty-one villages that extended roughly 120 kilometers southward. Representing about 54% of the total Nubian population in 1960, the Fadijja people spoke the second Nubian language and were generally more geographically dispersed. Their villages were typically located in elevated areas, providing a measure of protection against flooding. However, they also faced challenges due to the inundation of their agricultural lands. The Fadijja maintained a close relationship with the river, relying on it not only for sustenance but also as a vital part of their cultural and social practices. Despite their relative isolation, the Fadijja preserved unique cultural expressions in their language, art, and customs that distinguished them from both their Kenzi-speaking neighbors and the wider Egyptian and Sudanese societies.

Closer to the Sudanese border, the reservoir narrowed so that the last Nubian village in Egypt, Adindan, came closest to showing the type of Nubian economy and livelihood that must have existed before the construction of the Old Aswan Reservoir. The Fadija's closer ties to Sudanese Nubia fostered cultural exchange and economic interactions that were less impacted by the colonial and governmental policies that affected other Nubian communities. This blend of geographic advantages and cultural continuity meant that the Fadija, particularly in Adindan, were able to maintain their traditional livelihoods longer than those in more affected areas,

which experienced multiple displacements due to the construction of the reservoir.

Furthermore, Adindan economic practices were not only about agriculture but also encompassed trade with neighboring regions, allowing for a more diverse economic base. The village likely served as a hub where local agricultural products were exchanged for goods from surrounding areas, maintaining economic vitality and cultural identity despite the encroaching pressures of development and modernization. Thus, Adindan is a significant example of what traditional Nubian life was like before the transformative impacts of the Old Aswan Reservoir.

The High Dam is an embankment dam, built, between 1960 and 1970, across the Nile south of Aswan. Its significance largely eclipsed the previous Aswan reservoir. Based on the success of the old reservoir, then at its maximum utilization, construction of the High Dam became a key objective of the government following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. With its ability to better control flooding, provide increased water storage for irrigation, and generate hydroelectricity, the Dam was seen as key to Egypt's planned industrialization. The High Dam was not just an engineering marvel but a symbol of national pride and progress for Egypt. It was constructed to address the chronic issues of flooding that had plagued the Nile Valley for centuries, which often resulted in devastating consequences for agriculture and local communities. The dam's capacity to regulate the flow of the Nile meant that farmers could rely on a more consistent water supply for irrigation, significantly boosting agricultural productivity. Additionally, the creation of Lake Nasser behind the dam provided a massive reservoir that enhanced Egypt's water management capabilities.

Moreover, the High Dam played a pivotal role in the country's energy sector. By harnessing the power of the Nile to generate hydroelectricity, it provided a sustainable energy source that supported industrial growth and urban development. This influx of electricity was crucial for powering factories, schools, and homes, thereby contributing to the economic modernization envisioned by the post-revolution government. The Dam also became a focal point for national and international attention, symbolizing Egypt's aspirations for self-sufficiency and its commitment to harnessing natural resources for development. However, while the High Dam brought significant benefits, it also led to complex social, economic, and environmental challenges, particularly for the Nubian communities who were displaced as a result of its construction.

During 1956-57, the Permanent Council for National Production and Development carried out physical and aerial surveys to

determine the potentially flooded areas and the number and location of villages that were to be affected. The study reported, among other things, the impossibility of resettling the Nubian people around the shores of what was to be called Lake Nasser. Consequently, the study recommended resettling the Nubians in a new site north of Aswan. In response to these findings, the government-initiated plans for the resettlement of the Nubian communities, emphasizing the need to provide adequate infrastructure and services in the new location. The proposed site aimed to replicate some aspects of Nubian life, including access to agricultural land and social facilities. However, the logistics of relocating thousands of people posed significant challenges and many Nubians were apprehensive about leaving their ancestral homes. They were deeply connected to their land, culture, and traditions, making the transition a complex and emotional process.

The resettlement plan also involved consultations with local leaders and community members, although many felt their voices were not fully heard in the decision-making process. This led to growing concerns about the adequacy of the new arrangements and the potential loss of cultural identity. Despite the government's assurances, many Nubians worried that the move would disrupt their social fabric and way of life. As a result, the implementation of the resettlement plan was met with resistance and skepticism, highlighting the broader tensions between governmental policies and the lived realities of the affected communities.

The Dam is remembered by most Egyptians as one of their former leader's greatest accomplishments, a towering monument to the modernizing aspirations of an independent nation. President Nasser's 1960 speech addressed the Nubians and promised them that these changes would bring modernization and community-building:

> "The prosperity which shall cover the Nubians is enormous because it shall bring all Nubians together on a correct foundation to build a strong, healthy society."[1]

The contrast with reality could not have been greater. For the Nubians who were living in Old Nubia, the Dam destroyed a way of life. It flooded Nubian land along 500 kilometers of the Nile. At the time of its inauguration, it was the largest rock-filled Dam in the world. It created a new reservoir, Lake Nasser, which spilled over into Sudan. A large migration occurred, taking 100,000 Nubians

1 Nasser, Gamal Abdel. *Address to the Nubian People.* Speech delivered January 11, 1960. YouTube video. https://youtu.be/6gfVfVI3a3A.

of forty-four villages from their ancestral homeland, away from a way of life based around the river Nile for thousands of years, to desert life in villages built for them in the area of Kom Ombo (50 kilometers north of Aswan), known as New Nubia. The effects of the High Dam on the Nubian people were profound and far-reaching. The displacement of 100,000 Nubians not only severed their ties to their ancestral lands but also led to significant cultural dislocation. As they were forced to abandon their homes, many faced the loss of not just physical structures but also the cultural heritage embedded in their communities. The newly established villages in Kom Ombo, while designed to provide basic shelter, lacked the emotional and historical connections that the Nubians had with their original homes.

Moreover, the transition from a river-based economy to a desert environment posed serious challenges for their livelihoods. The agricultural practices that had sustained the Nubians for generations were disrupted, and many found it difficult to adapt to the new economic realities of life in New Nubia. While the government hailed the High Dam as a symbol of progress and modernization for the Nubians, it marked the beginning of a struggle to maintain their identity and way of life in the face of overwhelming change.

Before the eviction, the government tried to come up with a conciliation plan for resettlement. Relocation sites were chosen by the government to be in Kom Ombo. The construction of new villages for the Nubians was set in the plan, and models for these villages were shown and displayed to the Nubian people. Based on interviews with Nubians, some recall this period by saying it was a period of promises. The government promised them compensation for their homes by giving them new homes in the new resettlement villages and good compensation for their palms. The river Nile was scheduled to change course in May 1964, as such the need to proceed with the resettlement was pressing. This time pressure was coupled with an international campaign to save the ancient Egyptian monuments in Nubia, an action that was led by UNESCO as a coordinator between Egypt and the involved nations. The government's efforts to devise a resettlement plan were met with mixed reactions among the Nubian population. While some were hopeful about the promised compensation and new homes, others felt skeptical about the sincerity of the government's commitments. Many Nubians cherished a deep emotional connection to their ancestral lands, and the thought of being uprooted from their homes was distressing. This uncertainty led to a sense of anxiety among the community as they faced the impending changes. As the date for resettlement approached, the Nubians found themselves in a

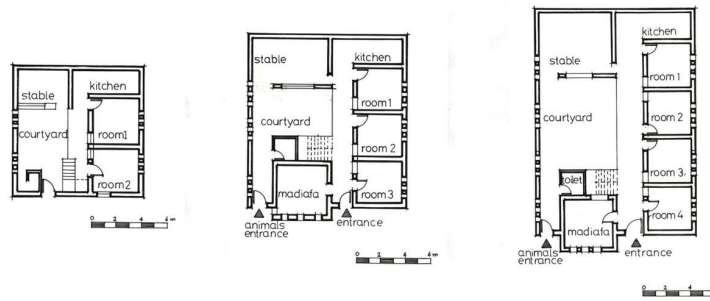

Figure 2.
The three prototypes of houses for the new villages.

state of limbo, caught between the hopes for a better future and the fear of losing their cultural heritage. The urgency of the situation intensified as the government pressed forward with plans to relocate them to Kom Ombo, but the true impact of such a dramatic shift on their lives and identities remained uncertain.

As an example of the Residential Unit's Design to Settle the People of Nubia, the National Organization for the Dislocation of Nubians established a set of recommendations for planning and designing the new villages. These guidelines stated that the houses should be identical using only three prototypes of the design. The prototypes were designed according to the number of rooms in each type (figure 2).

Nubian Resettlement Policies

The government policy consisted of an integrated and coordinated approach involving technical, social, and economic measures. This approach reflected some basic ideological principles of post-revolution Egypt.

A survey to collect demographic data about Nubia was part of an effort by several governmental agencies to carry through the resettlement scheme in the targeted period.

A national organization called "The National Organization for Nubian Resettlement" was formed as an intermediary between different ministries and agencies involved in the project. The Ministry of Housing and Development was assigned the task of planning the villages and designing the houses. The project faced several difficulties from the very beginning. The designated area for the project formed half a circle around land owned by the Wadi Kom Ombo Company and covered an area of 35,000 *feddans*. The land was

all deserts with no roads or water sources existing before the project started. Other amenities were absent as well. Accommodating professional and technical staff on the site was, therefore, out of the question. The Ministry of Housing decided to undertake the complex planning and design work from its main headquarters in Cairo. Despite the challenges, the Ministry of Housing aimed to create a structured environment that would support the resettled Nubians. They conducted detailed planning sessions to ensure that the new villages would reflect the cultural heritage of the Nubian people while incorporating modern infrastructure. The vision was to design homes that met the needs of the population, emphasizing community living and accessibility. However, the lack of local knowledge and understanding of Nubian cultural nuances often resulted in designs that did not resonate with the community's values. This disconnect led to frustration among the Nubians, who felt that their voices were not adequately heard in the planning process. As the project progressed, it became clear that the aspirations for a harmonious integration of modernity and tradition would require more than just physical structures; it demanded a deeper engagement with the cultural identity of the Nubian people.

The main planning and design premise was to ensure equality among the families by providing the same house design to families that had the same number of household members. As well, it was decided to use locally available construction materials to keep construction costs under check and to be able to complete the project in time.

The preliminary study of the project concluded that 30 villages were required to accommodate all the villages and *nujūʿ* of Lower Nubia. It was estimated that 16,000 housing units were required to accommodate families who were living in Nubia at the time of the preliminary study. For those who were working outside Nubia at the time, another 7,880 houses were to be built later as a second stage.

To maintain the geographic configuration of the villages in Old Nubia, the planners decided to keep the same arrangement of villages by locating the Kunūz villages in the northern part, the Arab villages in the middle, and the Fadija villages in the south. The names of the old villages were used for the new villages. In each of these three groups, a "central" village was designated as a service center. Each contained a large mosque, a police station, a health unit, an elementary school, and an agriculture cooperative. An administrative capital for the entire resettlement district — Nasser City — was built in a central location. Finally, the district was to be included as one of the regional districts of the Governorate of Aswan. In addition to these planning measures, special attention was given

to the social and cultural dynamics of the Nubian communities. The aim was to create a supportive environment that fostered connections among families and maintained their cultural identity. The layout of the new villages was designed to encourage community interaction, with communal spaces such as parks and gathering areas integrated into the planning. However, as the construction progressed, it became evident that the government planners underestimated the importance of the traditional social fabric of the Nubian society. Many residents expressed dissatisfaction with the new arrangements, feeling that the designs did not adequately reflect their customs and lifestyles. This oversight led to tensions within the community, as many felt their cultural heritage was being overlooked in favor of a standardized model. As the Nubians moved into their new homes, they began to adapt the structures to better suit their needs, incorporating elements of their traditional architectural styles to preserve their identity amidst the changes.

To comply with the deadlines, the planners decided to locate the villages close to each other, contrary to the initial planning scheme which envisaged that the location of each village be close to its allocated agricultural land. Villages were built on both sides of the existing Aswan-Cairo highway.

This decision to cluster the villages together, rather than distribute them across the landscape, was driven by time constraints and logistical considerations. However, it also resulted in significant challenges for the Nubian communities. By placing the villages close to one another, the planners inadvertently disrupted the traditional way of life that the Nubians had maintained for generations. The spatial arrangement, which prioritized accessibility over cultural relevance, led to a sense of disconnection from their agricultural roots. As the Nubians settled into their new homes, many felt a profound loss, not only of their ancestral land but also of the communal and familial ties that had been woven into the fabric of their former villages. The new village layout lacked the organic flow and interconnection that characterized their old settlements, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration among the residents as they grappled with the reality of their new environment.

The construction method recommended for the project by the Cairo planners was to use partly dressed limestone to build the walls and reinforced concrete roofs on top. The traditional mud-brick construction system of Nubian houses before the resettlement was not considered.

Tūmās wa ʿĀfya and High Dam

A few months before resettlement some Nubians from Tūmās wa ʿĀfya complained to the government that they didn't want to move to Esna but preferred to be with the other Nubian villages near Kom Ombo. On June 11th, 1963, an official governmental committee tried to reconcile the points of view and to persuade those who insisted on immigrating to the Kom Ombo to move to Esna according to the original plan.

As detailed above, the original plan was to resettle the village to Esna according to the choice of its people to be close to the eight thousand *feddans* they had bought in the late 1930s.

It appears that both groups were unwilling to change their positions. To deal with this controversy, the committee ran a referendum to find out how many wanted to immigrate to Kom Ombo. Since the original plan was to resettle them in Esna, the officials announced that it would submit to the people's desire to move to Kom Ombo but on three conditions. First, the families had to officially relinquish any claims to the land they had previously purchased in Esna. Second, they would have to agree to be treated like other Nubians who were being resettled in Kom Ombo, meaning they would not receive any special privileges or considerations. Finally, they were required to forgo any requests for specific land allocations within the Kom Ombo area.

These stipulations were intended to ensure a smooth transition while also managing the logistics of the resettlement, but they also reflected the government's underlying desire to maintain authority over the process and minimize any potential complications that could arise from individual land claims:

a) to relinquish, officially, the land they bought earlier in Esna;
b) to accept being treated like the rest of the Nubians (who were to be resettled near Kom Ombo); and
c) to not request any specific area or site in the Kom Ombo resettlement district.

On the understanding that all concerned were to accept these three conditions, the government ran a referendum in June 1963. The results indicated that the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya (1363 families) were of two opinions. One-third (364 families from Āfiye hamlets: Fāshir, Dinabe, Fūdabe, Shagīg, Arab Hille, Hinesabe, and Khērēn) chose to be resettled in the Kom Ombo district, in a location between the villages of Gustul and Abu Simbel. The remaining two-thirds (999 families) chose to be resettled near Esna (figure 3).

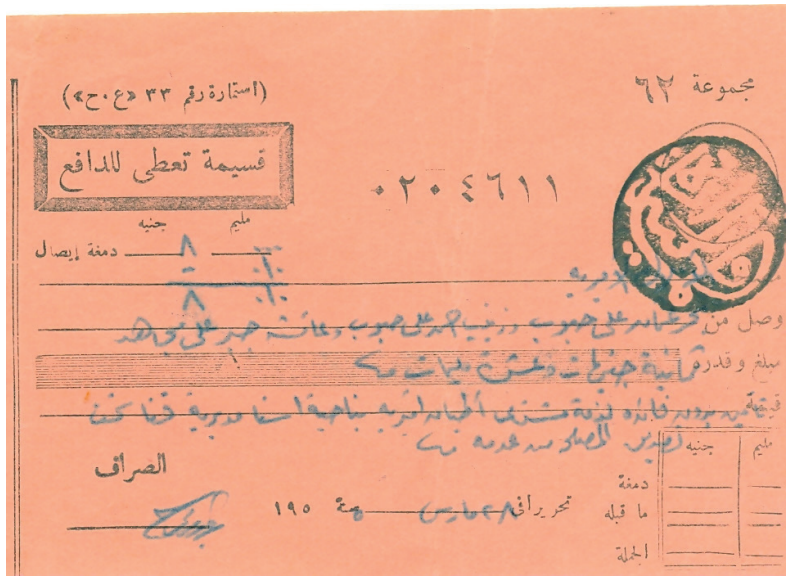

Figure 3.
The author's grandfather's 1954 receipt of the compensation as a deposit for farmland reclamation in Esna.

In Esna, the government built the following facilities: three primary schools and one preparatory school, a co-op association, a social services unit, a clinic, a post office, a telephone office, a police and fire unit, four stores, and three mosques.

The families who were resettled in the Esna project were located in three main villages, each of which had two sub-villages:

- "Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Wāḥid" (Arabic for "1") was uninhabited until 1970 and was located at 25°16'54.50" N, 32°30'42.98" E. The main settlement was called *Al Ra'īsiya* (Arabic for "main"). Its sub-village was called Khalīliye-Ashmāwi.
- "Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Itnēn" (Arabic for "2") was located at 25°19'52.41" N, 32°29'25.23" E. Al Ra'īsiye was called Moradāb-Mārya. Its sub-village was called Izbet el Zeet-Izbet el Sāb.
- "Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Talāta" (Arabic for "3") was located at 25°22'46.24" N, 32°28'43.34" E. Al Ra'īsiya was called Mansur-Sāb. Its sub-village was given three different designations: *Alif* (Arabic for "A") included Shibakīye, Jelegāb, and Āfiye), *Be* (Arabic for "B"), and Gīm (Arabic for "C") included Ambaray, Ḥimerīye, and Ōba) (figure 4).

Apart from the above three "villages," the government built an additional "village," called Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Arbaʿa (Arabic for "4"). It was located at 25°23'12.84"N, 32°28'46.72"E. It was to be inhabited by non-Nubians most of whom were originally from Esna; they used to work and live in the Sudanese town of Wadi Halfa close to

Figure 4. Resettlement of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya from the Original Village to Kom Ombo and Esna.

the border with Egypt. When the time of resettlement came, these Upper Egyptians preferred to come back to Egypt instead of going to Khashm al Gerba (southeastern Sudan) with the rest of Wadi Halfa's Nubians.

In 1970, the government had almost completed the reclamation of the farmland that the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya had previously paid for from their compensation. These lands were located five kilometers west of Esna. For accounting purposes, the lands were divided into nine agricultural areas and were serviced with pump stations, canals, and roads.

At this point, the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya requested to move closer to their farmlands and the government responded positively. At that moment, internal immigration began. People from Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Itnēn moved to Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Wāḥid near their farmlands (in agricultural areas numbers 1, 2, and 3), while half of the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Talāta (hamlets Oba, Sheppakeyyah, and Telegraph) moved to Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Itnēn closer to their land (in agricultural areas numbers 8 and 9). People of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Arba'a moved into Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Talāta to clear the area that was chosen to serve as a temporary location for an army officers' school (a move that was deemed necessary due to the circumstances surrounding the war with Israel at the time) (figure 5).

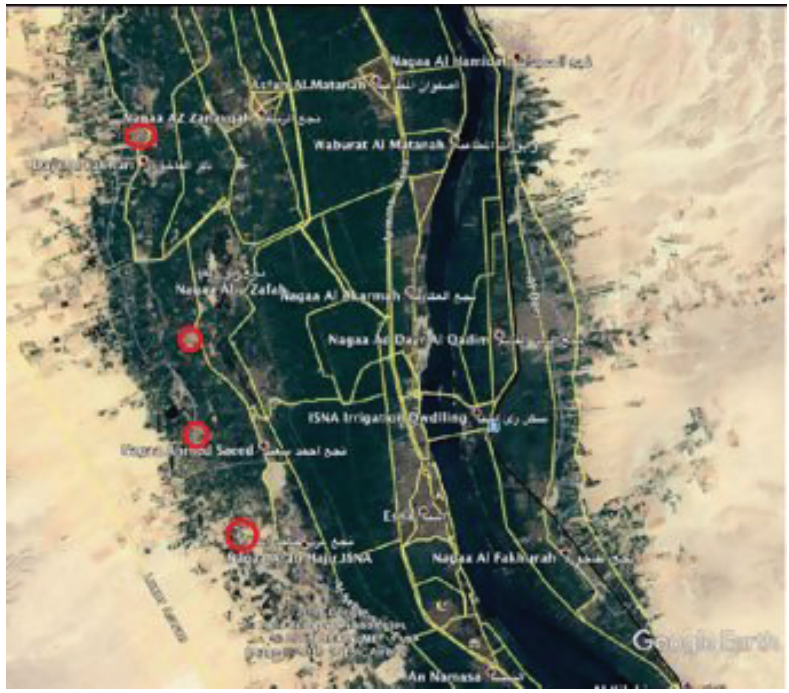

Figure 5.
Tūmās wa ʿĀfya villages in Esna.

Later, in 1978, and like the other moves described above, the other half of the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Talāta moved into a newly built village that was called Tūmās wa ʿĀfya al Wusta (Arabic for "central"). It was located at 25°18'29.26" N, 32°29'32.73" E and was close to the farmlands that belonged to the people from the hamlets of Mansour, Sāb, Ambaray, and Himerīye. These lands were in agricultural areas numbers 4, 5, 6, and 7.

In the late 1970s, the Egyptian government decided to auction off the houses in the village of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Talāta, which attracted many non-Nubians from nearby Upper Egyptian villages. These newcomers purchased homes at the auction and established their residences in Tūmās wa ʿĀfya. Consequently, although these individuals were not of Nubian descent, their identification documents officially listed them as residents of the village. This development introduced a demographic shift in Tūmās wa ʿĀfya, gradually transforming the cultural and social landscape of the village.

In the seventies and eighties, the villages described above had acquired numerous cultural facilities including youth centers. During games, tournaments, and competitions, interactions between youths from different villages resulted in some identity-based conflicts. Cases of harassment and quarrels were reported

especially among youths who were born after the resettlement of 1964.

At the end of 2007, the government gave the same name — Tūmās wa ʿĀfya — to a cluster of a hundred new houses built on the Western shore of Lake Nasser at approximately the same location as the original village of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya (22°46'53.75" N, 32° 1'54.62" E) in Old Nubia. One hundred families were settled there. Each was allocated five acres of reclaimable land. None of these families were from Tūmās wa ʿĀfya originally. None were Nubian.

Thus, after nearly forty-five years from the time the Nubians resettlement outside of their ancestral homeland, there existed seven different villages carrying the same name Tūmās wa ʿĀfya officially. Yet only four of these are now inhabited by Nubians. These are Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Wahed, Itnēn, Al Wusta, and Nasr al Nuba. The other three, Talāta, Arba'a, and al-Nuba al-Gadīda, are inhabited by non-Nubians whose national identity cards show them as citizens of places with Nubian names.

As almost always happens when national governments invoke "national interest" or "national security" to relocate groups of citizens geographically, significantly different cultural cum ethnic populations end up living away from their kin and, instead, lived in close proximity to non-kin.

Thus, in the case of the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya, some families ended up near Esna and some near Kom Ombo. To work around their arbitrary separation, families continue to spend time and scarce monetary resources visiting each other. From the early 1970s, countless families used the annual school midyear break to visit their estranged relatives. The frequency of these visits tended to increase as the means of transportation improved. An equally significant manner of expressing the deeply felt resistance to the arbitrary separation of kin is evident in the continuation of marriages between those near Esna and those near Kom Ombo.

The tangled history of Nubian resettlement summarized above leads to a clear and inevitable conclusion: uprooting people and arbitrarily separating them from each other geographically does not override and does not reduce the feelings of shared cultural cum ethnic identity among them. Despite nuanced differences, Nubians in Egypt and Sudan are one.

The government's resettlement housing policy

A prefabricated building method was suggested for the construction of the houses, especially since the house floor plans were appropriate for that type of construction. This option was quickly abandoned

because the village sites were far from available factories in those days, and the time allowed for construction was too short to allow for the development of new factories to meet the resettlement needs. Another reason for rejecting the prefabricated method was its high cost which was estimated to be 160% higher than the traditional method of construction that was ultimately recommended for the project.

Planning of the resettlement villages

The National Organization for Nubian Resettlement established a set of recommendations for planning and designing the new villages. These guidelines stated that the house designs should be developed using only three design prototypes. The prototypes were based on the number of rooms in each type (see figure 2).

The large house consisted of 4 bedrooms, a *maḍyafa/mandara* (guest room), an open courtyard, a kitchen, a stable, and a toilet. This type was to be assigned to large families which had seven or more members. The medium house consisted of three bedrooms, a *maḍyafa,* a courtyard, a kitchen, a stable, and a toilet. This type was to be assigned to families of five to seven members. Finally, the small house consisted of two bedrooms, a *maḍyafa,* a courtyard, a kitchen, a stable, and a toilet. The small house was to be assigned to families of less than five members.

A fourth type was later added at the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs to accommodate small families of two members, single widows, or bachelors. This type contained one room, a courtyard, a kitchen, and a toilet. The idea behind this scheme was to provide equality among the Nubian families.

The openings for doors and windows in all the rooms were to be oriented north to bring the much-favored wind into the rooms, and small high openings were to be made on the opposite side to create cross-ventilation.

The houses were allowed only one frontage to reduce the total necessary street lengths. For the two largest types of houses, it was recommended that the design include two entrances: one for the inhabitants and their visitors and the other for the animals. Each house was to have a separate *maḍyafa* to receive and entertain guests. The *maḍyafa* was not covered but left for the Nubians to cover it the way they wished.

These recommendations and guidelines were presented to the housing and planning professionals so they could use them in developing the plan for the villages and the design of the houses. The planning of the villages did not always adhere to these

recommendations but yielded occasionally to technical and financial considerations.

To save as much construction material as possible and use less of the land area allocated for housing and, at the same time, minimize the outside walls exposed to direct sun, the houses were organized in groups as back-to-back rows. The streets were oriented north-south to minimize their exposure to the sun and to allow the rows of rooms inside the houses to be oriented north. By using the back-to-back arrangement only half of the houses were oriented to the desired north direction while the other half was oriented south.

Attitudes toward resettlement were, predictably, mixed with hopes and dreams, and varied. People who enjoyed economic stability in Old Nubia were not enthusiastic about moving. Among them were the few prosperous farmers, shopkeepers, boat owners, and government employees. Age and sex were also important in determining people's attitudes toward resettlement. Young people tended to be optimistic, and men looked forward to a more exciting life and a broader range of economic and social opportunities. Women anticipated speedy marriages or more frequent reunions with their husbands.

Nubian house and the attitudes of the administration

It is important to consider the general attitudes of the administrators as well as the Nubians to be able to understand how the environment emerged in the atmosphere that prevailed at that time. As an overall generalization of the situation, the government was viewed as an entity of itself. One has a different personality as a government employee than his normal one outside the office. Bureaucracy alienated people from the authorities including government employees.

Nevertheless, the government's approach toward Nubian resettlement was unilateral, i.e., there was no actual Nubian participation in plan formulations. The Nubian voice was always heard but seldom taken into account except in cases where it was possible to accommodate Nubian desires easily within the general framework of the government aims.

Administrators — belonging mainly to social strata whose outlooks were quite different from those of the Nubians — typically saw (and continue to see) Nubians in terms of stereotypes involving backwardness and stupidity. Based on these implicit assumptions and latent attitudes, officials tended to think that Nubians should accept with gratitude what is offered to them.

From the Nubian point of view, the government was seen as an instrument of imposition and control. They viewed the government employees who served in Old Nubia as inexperienced and/or "exiled" into this remote area due to underperformance or misdeeds. Nubians had very little contact with government officials or other citizens due to their relative geographical isolation and apparent cultural differences. Because of their past experiences, Nubians hardly trusted the administrators' promises and plans.

Nubians were particularly displeased with what they saw as arbitrary, sudden, and unannounced changes in government policies and plans. For example, the design of the large house type was altered and the back alleys, which were intended to separate the animals' entrances from the people's entrances, were omitted and both types of entrances were placed next to each other on the same side of the house. Another example has to do with a heat-insulation construction system (based on the use of hollow concrete block roof construction technology) that was initially proposed for the entire settlement project. This was dropped during implementation without explanation or consultation. The flat reinforced concrete slabs that were implemented were not insulated and allowed the heat to penetrate the rooms, where poor ventilation trapped the heat inside.

The elitist attitude held by the resettlement officials allowed them to dismiss or trivialize the value of the Nubians' participation in the planning and designing of the villages and houses. For example, it was mentioned in the Ministry of Social Affairs report on the resettlement of Nubians that the Nubians were consulted during the design stages of the houses and that a full-scale house model was built for Nubian delegates and representatives to see and comment on it. Yet the houses that were later built proved unacceptable to the Nubians. Either these delegates were shown a different model from the one used in the implementation, or the delegates did not communicate all their disagreements to the officials. It is also possible that the officials dismissed the views offered by the delegates who they considered to be uneducated Nubians. Be that as it may, the result was the same: a growing rift between Nubians and officials and a tendency to implement plans that were unsatisfactory to the Nubians.

It is of course easy to attribute sources of Nubian dissatisfaction to time and resource constraints. However, this was not always the case. An example will illustrate. The resettlement houses, regardless of type or size, included an animal stable inside the houses. A stable inside the house is a typical feature of rural housing in Upper Egypt, but this arrangement was culturally unacceptable to the

Nubians. It was a design feature that was based on misinformation about Nubian culture. It was, we should add, easily avoidable by, for example, building collective stables at the end of house blocks without additional costs.

Similarly, the design of resettlement houses proves that their architects conceived houses mainly as sleeping shelters, not as places for living in the manner that Nubian culture required. Services were provided according to the number of rooms in each house. In short, the designers did not understand the social, cultural, and community aspects of the Nubian way of living. Such understanding would have enabled them to avoid basic design mistakes and to earn the acceptance of more Nubians.

The Nubians who were not residing in their original villages at the time of the resettlement were not assigned houses in the newly planned villages. They became known as *al-Mughtaribīn* (Arabic for "expatriates"). Different Nubian ethnic groups which were not neighbors before the resettlement became neighbors because of the planning scheme which located their villages close to each other. They shared services and were forced to be in contact with each other which created problems, especially for villages that belonged to ill-matched groups.

Esna houses

On Tuesday, May 26th of 1964 the first group of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya families arrived at Esna by train. They were received by a committee headed by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Governor of Qena, the Mayor of Esna, and many other officials.

The region represents a complete residence that has its special nature as a result of the site circumstances and its determinants, which had a role in village construction materials and design. The village planning concept came as a routine instead of planning beside the Nile, and the village must be divided according to residential units and not according to related links to the basic home, in which the residential units join from three sides to save spaces for constructing and save one elevation for every habitat to reduce roads surfaces in which the residential units became attached.

Basics of Settlement of Families and Individuals in the New Villages (Villages of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya)

The government built limited housing for families that were displaced from Nubia to Esna, and the settlement was based on the governmental inventory that was carried out before the construction

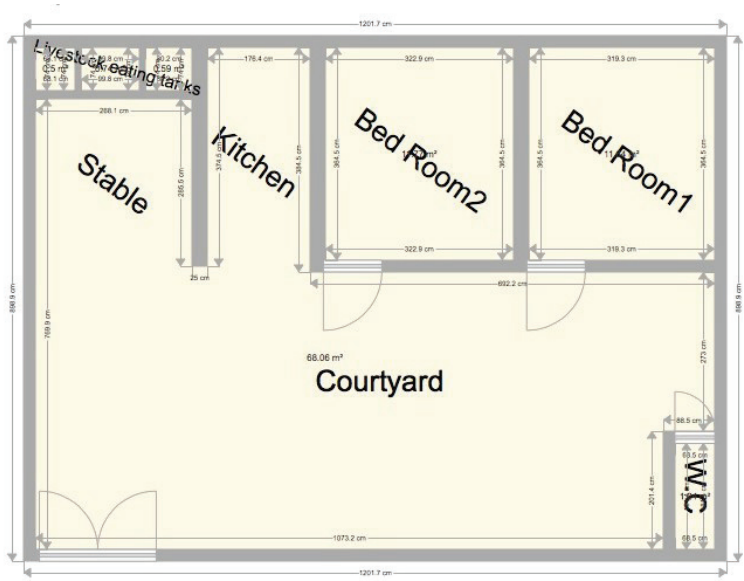

Figure 6. Layout of government-built houses at Tūmās wa ʿĀfya as issued by the government.

of the High Dam. The number of families is estimated to be about 200, and due to the absence of expatriates, who were out of Nubia during the inventory process, they were not given dwellings. As my grandfather observed at the time, this "means that there has been no intense stability for the sons of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya in Esna because there are no residences for expatriates." These dwellings were distributed according to the size of the family, and the residential models were also designed on this basis, not for considerations of social status or the area of the old dwelling, or kinship ties.

Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Talāta and Itnēn have been completed while Tūmās wa ʿĀfya Wāḥid was under construction. As I mentioned above, similar house types were grouped in blocks and separated from each other by twenty-meter-wide streets. The house type used here was the two-bedroom house in the middle of which was a 12 by 5-meter courtyard, two 3.60 by 2.80-meter rooms, a 3.60 by 1.80-meter kitchen, a 3.60 by 3.60 meter stable, and a 1 by 2-meter toilet (figure 6).

In the Esna houses, the roof slabs used the hollow concrete blocks I mentioned before. The walls of the houses were built to a height of two meters if the surrounding areas were not to be roofed. Otherwise, the roof heights varied from 2.5 meters to 3.0 meters. Since the authorities built only one type of house in the Esna villages, larger families were assigned two adjacent housing units which the occupants joined subsequently.

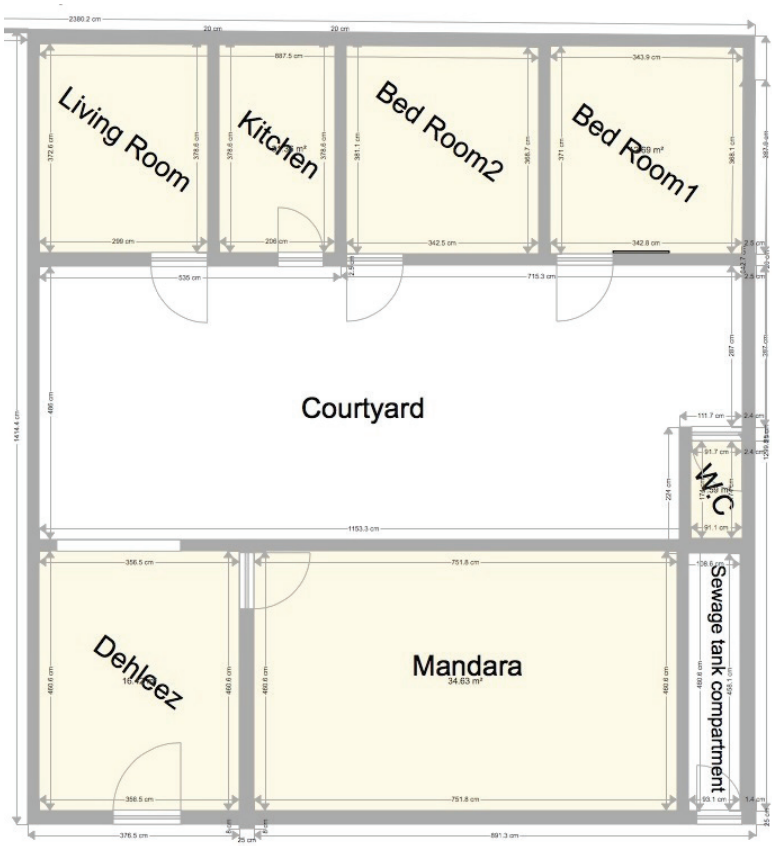

Figure 7. Layout of government-built houses at Tūmās wa ʿĀfya after modification by residents.

The displacement of individuals from their native social environments — severing deep-seated cultural roots to relocate them into modern housing — remains under-examined from both a sociological and humanitarian perspective, particularly regarding the impact on the traditional Nubian identity. Despite fifty years having passed since their resettlement, a sense of displacement persists. This lack of integration has forced them to adapt their living spaces based on evolving functional and communal needs, driven by shifting family structures and the changing requirements of modern life. Alongside this, the architectural and urban interferences of the users in a time interval of fifty years were focused on the level of the elevations and facades and the interference on the level of the residential unit due to the multiple changes done by the user to adapt to the new situation. The relocated community started to make changes and modify captions to the new residences built by the state, to make the individual feel balanced, which is his ability to

express himself. The furthermost things expressed by the users are the inheritances surrounding him.

As expected, Nubian families started to modify the government-built houses almost as soon as they moved in. The first stage of modification typically involved rising them to roughly the 3-meter level. In many cases families covered the courtyard with thick mats made from a plant that grows in canals and draining ditches; they placed these mats over tree branches or trunks. Some more ambitious families modified the house floor plan to create a combined unroofed space for a stable, kitchen, and Nubian bread oven.

In the second stage of modifications, families enlarged the total house space by adding up to five meters to its front and replacing the courtyard and new kitchen roofing with palm branches and later with corrugated metal sheets panels (figure 7).

In 1978, the building of the village of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya El-Wusṭa included all house prototypes (1, 2, 3, and 4-bedroom types, see figure 2) with, in certain cases, a difference in the wall construction material whereby red bricks replaced limestone blocks. It is worth mentioning another aspect of the modifications that the Nubian people made to their new houses in this and other villages. From the mid-sixties to the beginning of the eighties, the builders who modified Nubian houses were Nubians, and they used the same mud-brick sizes and brick-making molds that were used in Old Nubia (length: 25 cm, width: 12.5 cm; depth: 7 cm) and that are quite different from those typically used by Upper Egyptians, known locally as Ṣaʿīdis (length: 20 cm, width: 10 cm, depth: 7 cm).

Starting from the 1990s, some Nubians modified their houses in what can be considered a third stage, one that involved replacing mud-bricks and mud mortar with red bricks and concrete. Then, ten to fifteen years later, some started to rebuild entire houses or parts of houses using new foundations, reinforced concrete columns, and slabs, while preserving, as much as possible, the essential identity of the Old Nubian houses.

Concluding remarks

The relation between the human and the environment is reciprocal, each one affects and is affected by the other, and the result of this interaction expresses its cultural dimension, thus forming the architecture that forms the physical frame that includes the inhabitants.

Traditional local heritage is a true mirror of the culture of the society across the ages, through its elements and its effect on the

behavior, lifestyle, beliefs, and arts of people. It is also an inspiration for a lot of the heritage marks in architecture and buildings.

The traditional building is considered the sum of knowledge, experimentation, and interaction with the surrounding context and reflects the response to the attempts to fulfill human requirements along with the history of societies. Meanwhile, it is the true record of the culture of the society and its local heritage.

The Nubians migrated in 1964 into villages different in nature and climate to their original villages. They moved into houses with different designs from their originals. The Nubians made several direct adjustments to the architecture of their new houses and villages to fit their physical and emotional needs. They interacted with the new urban context in the new settlement villages.

The emigration was accompanied by an emotional emigration through different experiences and cultural and environmental values obtained from old Nubia, which the Nubians firmly held, even if they contradicted the pressures and definitions of the new place.

The change in the natural environment due to the migration from Old Nubia to the new settlements was accompanied by a change in the activities and cultural and economic behavior of the society, which reflected directly on the characteristics of the Nubian personality and gave it new values. Instead of being ranked according to ethnic or familial origin, financial ability and economic status became the main determinant of the social ranking.

The unsuitability of the emigration villages and houses in general for the Nubian culture and habits is notable. The limited spaces of the houses did not fulfill the extended family's needs. In addition, the division of the village was into sectors, each including a standardized house model (one, two, or three rooms) which was distributed according to the number of family members, without taking into consideration the degree of relation and the classic division of Nubian villages into *najaʿ* and residential communities based on related families. The basic units of the new Nubian community became the separate family with a separate house ending the role of the extended family that lived in a big house or multiple neighboring houses.

The Nubians — despite all the negatives of the emigration and the different architectures of new villages — retained a lot of the aspects and details of their heritage special culture, habits, and traditions.

I hope that the above discussion has now set the record straight concerning the timing of and the circumstances surrounding the resettlement of the people of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya to their new villages

near Esna and Kom Ombo. I also hope that the discussion relayed a sense of how difficult and often winding the road has been.

In the absence of the forgoing documentation of the difficulties and disappointments encountered by the Nubian people, and in fairness, by the government officials as well, the seemingly simple phrase "Nubian resettlement" would lead to a false impression that the process had clear aims, a clear beginning, and clear end. The reality, as I hope I have been able to convey, was/is anything but straightforward.

Finally, it is necessary to underscore the resilience and resourcefulness of the Nubians whose determination to keep their culture alive was manifested in the modifications they made to the mass-produced houses they were presented within the resettlement villages.

Afterword

Bahr Osman Habbob, my maternal grandfather, was born on August 7, 1910, in the village of Tūmās wa ʿĀfya, near Derr (Nubia) in the Aswan Governorate. He started his education at the village's Quranic school at five. In 1920, his older half-brother Maher Osman came from Cairo, brought him to the city, and enrolled him in an elementary school in the Maʿrouf district. Two years later, he was transferred to another school in the Abdeen district, where Bahr advanced to the fourth grade. However, shortly before the exams, a dispute arose between his half-brother and Bahr's mother, which led to his withdrawal from school despite objections from his teachers and the principal. Bahr had been at the top of his class each of those four years.

After leaving school, Bahr worked various jobs, including as a doorman at an Italian school in Alexandria, and later as a bank collector, a position he held until he retired at sixty. From 1930 to 1975, he served as secretary for the village association for Tūmās wa ʿĀfya in Alexandria.

Upon retirement, he returned to his village, which had been relocated to Esna in the Qena Governorate in 1964 due to the construction of the High Dam. Bahr Habbob passed away in 1981, leaving behind a son, three daughters, and several grandchildren. I, Maher Habbob, am his eldest grandchild.

Bahr Habbob left his children a valuable legacy upon his passing: agricultural land, several houses, a library with 3,000 books, and his personal diaries. He also preserved many documents related to events and issues affecting his village and Nubia, particularly those concerning the construction of the Aswan Reservoir and the High

Dam. Bahr gathered these materials over the years, not only as a reader and intellectual but also in his role as secretary of his village association in Alexandria for over 45 years.

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Remaking Home After Displacement: A Case Study From Egyptian Nubia

Amany Abdelsadeq

For more than fifteen centuries, Nubians lived in the Nile Valley between the First Cataract at Aswan in southern Egypt and the Fourth Cataract upstream from Dongola in Sudan. The cataract at Aswan, and the barren deserts on either side of the valley isolated Nubians from other neighboring groups, enabling them to retain their cohesiveness as an ethno-linguistic group with distinguishing cultural traditions. Much of the Nubian region consisted of rocky shoreline. The limited arable lands in Nubia were not enough encouraging for permanent colonization by the empires of ancient and medieval times (ancient Egyptian, Roman, and Islamic). However, Nubia was perceived as "The Corridor to Africa" by these same empires. This unique situation permitted the partial independence of Nubia while under the political influence of these empires,[1] enabling the Nubians to creatively adopt the belief systems of neighboring empires. These systems became entangled with long-standing Nubian traditions.[2]

After the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1902, and its subsequent heightening in 1912 and 1933, Northern Nubian (Arabic: *Kunūz*) villages, were submerged under the Nile waters. This submersion forced the Kunūz Nubians to rebuild their houses at higher levels each time. Also, most of the agricultural land in Kunūz villages became inundated for most of the year. Cultivation was only possible along a narrow strip of the plain for two months during the summer. This impoverishment forced Nubian men to migrate to Egyptian cities in search for work, while women and children were left behind in Nubia. In Egypt, Nubian men learned to speak Arabic

1 Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians.*
2 Smith, "Colonial Entanglements."

and were partially acculturated by the Egyptian culture. Thus, the isolation of Nubians that had lasted for centuries gradually changed.[3]

Despite the heightening of the Aswan Dam, the effects of the Nile flooding were devastating along the Valley and the Delta villages causing much loss in life and property. Therefore, the new Egyptian regime in 1954 decided to build the High Dam, a new dam in Aswan higher than the already existing one. This meant that the entirety of Nubia was to be submerged under the High Dam reservoir. So, it was decided to relocate the Nubians to the Kom Ombo area, 50 km north of Aswan City. This resettlement plan compacted Egyptian Nubia from 39 villages along 320 kilometers of the Nile into 33 villages occupying a 60-kilometer-long crescent away from the Nile in the desert.[4] Several studies discussed the challenges of the resettlement of Nubians after their displacement. These studies focused on "home-building" issues and the wide dissatisfaction among the Nubians towards their new houses, but they say little on "home-remaking" efforts in the aftermath of their displacement.[5] The term "home-remaking" implies the material and social practices for turning a meaningless space into a place that embodies the state of being-at-home with its particular emotions; control, safety, comfort, privacy, familiarity, and the expression of personal identity and the social norms of the community.[6] These practices were undertaken to overcome feelings of alienation by expressing one's preferences not only in his/her new house, but also the larger environment in the new village.[7]

In this research, I explore how the people of Abu Hor, a Kunūz Nubian village, could remake their homes and homeland in the aftermath of their displacement in December 1964. I am drawing on the scholarship on home-making practices in diverse contexts of displacement, as well as auto-ethnographic research based on narratives from elderly people with whom I talked in order to understand the techniques they had developed to deal with the new home life in resettlement, a life that was far from the life they had already experienced. The research begins with an explanation of the built environment of old Abu Hor and the socio-cultural values that

3 Hopkins and Mehanna, "The Nubian Ethnological Survey"; Fernea and Rouchdy, "Nubian Culture and Ethnicity."

4 Hopkins and Mehanna, "The Nubian Ethnological Survey: History and Methods"; Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians.*

5 Fernea and Kennedy, "Initial Adaptations to a New Life for Egyptian Nubians"; Fahim, "Community Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt"; Kassem, *The Failure of Vernacular Housing Policy and Design in Egypt: The Case of Nubia.*

6 occagni, Pérez Murcia, and Belloni, *Thinking Home on the Move: A Conversation across Disciplines;* Werner, Altman, and Oxley, "Temporal Aspects of Homes: A Transactional Perspective;" Dossa and Golubovic, "Reimagining Home in the Wake of Displacement;" Ilcan and Squire, "Syrian Experiences of Remaking Home."

7 Guetemme, "Collecting: The Migrant's Method for Home-Making;" Boccagni, Pérez Murcia, and Belloni, *Thinking Home on the Move.*

created and ordered this environment. Then, the research focuses on the different material and social practices that they used to create a sense of home in new Abu Hor. Finally, the research ends with an analysis of the home-making process based on the framework set by Perez Murcia,[8] who proposed that home can be remade in terms of four aspects: material place, familiar landscape, social world, and emotional space. The conclusion of the research underscores the main outcomes of the home-making process with its challenges, resolutions, as well as cultural continuity and change.

Before displacement

My family originated from a small Kunūz Nubian village called Abu Hor. The old Abu Hor was located about sixty kilometers south of the city of Aswan, near Kalabsha village and its famous temple. The post steamboat was the only means of transportation linking Nubian villages to Egypt, starting from the village of Al-Shalal in Aswan to Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian Sudanese border, passing through all the Egyptian Nubian villages. This steamboat used to pass by our village on Wednesdays coming from Aswan and on Mondays returning from Wadi Halfa. It carried passengers, goods, letters, and money orders from migrating men to their families in the village.

The topography of the old Abu Hor was rough; the Nile banks comprised of high rock plateaus overlooking the river, leaving small plain pockets on few locations. Kawthar Abd El-Rasoul and Mohamed Riad visited the village in 1962 and described it. Their description is worth quoting at length:

> This was the first time we saw Abu Hor on a summer morning, and the view was beautiful, (...) , the Nile had dropped below its winter level by about twenty meters or a little less, and we were (...) raising our eyes to a rock wall more than fifty meters high, and at the foot of the rock wall, there was a green strip no more than fifty meters wide, and on top of the rocks were scattered high houses, and due to the height, we could only see the edges of their decorated walls for long distances.....
>
> After about half an hour, the rock wall of Abu Hor retreated in a large arc, and opened up into a small agricultural basin whose depth did not exceed one hundred and fifty meters inward. The cultivated areas in this small plain did not exceed several narrow strips, while green grass covered the remaining areas. Numbers

8 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

Figure 1. Photograph of old Abu-Hor in 1962. (Riad and Abd el-Rasoul, *Rihla fi Zaman al-Nuba:* p.293/b).

> of camels, perhaps more than twenty-five camels, and numbers of goats and sheep spread throughout the area.....[9]
>
> A little before four o'clock we reached the hamlets of Abu Hor. The Nile is much narrower, the eastern plateau is high and continuous for kilometers, the western bank is less high and continuous and consists of groups of unconnected hills.[10]

Abu Hor extended for ten kilometers and included 23 hamlets built on the rugged lands at the eastern and western fringes of the valley, leaving the narrow plain for agriculture. These hamlets extended thinly along the Nile and were separated from each other by topographic features like *khor*[11] and steep hills. In winter, the water of the Aswan Dam reservoir used to fill the valley and back up into the *khors,* making hamlets' sites like peninsulas, and small felucca sailboats were ferrying the people across hamlets. During the summer, as the water level of the Nile used to recede, *khor* lands became visible and people often moved between the hamlets by donkey or on foot.

Since most social relations were associated with hamlets, the village lacked the real structure of a social unit. Even so, the village had a role of cohesiveness. It served as an administrative unit under the supervision of a governmentally appointed mayor (Arabic: *ʿumda*) whose guesthouse was the place where the people of Abu Hor gathered to make crucial decisions that concerned the entire village. The old village had three primary schools, a telegraph office, and a health center. These facilities were distributed among the dif-

9 Riad and Abd el-Rasoul. *Rihla fi Zaman al-Nuba,* p. 68.
10 Riad and Abd el-Rasoul. *Rihla fi Zaman al-Nuba,* p. 132.
11 *Khōr:* an Arabic word that stands for a natural swale cutting through the desert plateau at right angles to the Nile.

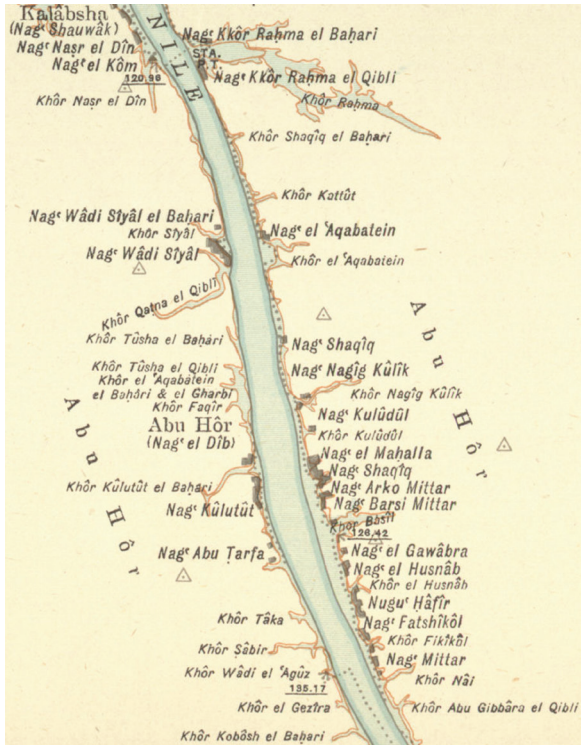

Figure 2. Map of the hamlets of old Abu Hor in 1937. Source: https://archives.ungeneva.org/kalabsha-4.

ferent hamlets, and served not only the people of Abu Hor, but also the adjacent villages.

The people of Abu Hor belonged to seven tribes, or maximal lineages, which were divided among major lineages distributed over hamlets. Each hamlet (Arabic: *najaʿ*)[12] consisted of minor lineages forming a patrilineal descent group that had lived in the hamlet for generations and shared kinship ties. The *najaʿ* created a sense of belonging, as people used to refer to themselves by their hamlet and particular descent group, which were believed to express pride and distinctive personalities.

The *najaʿ* served as the main social unit that formed the Nubian society. It was the actual unit of community life that was organized through propinquity and kinship bonds and carried important social obligations, such as endogamous marriage, purchase on credit, mutual aid in times of need, and taking care of the migrating men's families. The *najaʿ* served as the appropriate domain for women to participate in social life. While men were more concerned with village affairs and could move freely between hamlets and villages,

12 The term *najaʿ* is the standard academic transliteration for "hamlet," whereas the 1937 map employs the spelling *nagʿ*.

Figure 3.
A *najaʿ* in old Abu Hor. (Hasan, *Abu Hor Baladna:* p.171/a).

women were restricted to their *najaʿ* where they practiced social and economic activities, ranging from subsistence farming and raising livestock to participating in *najaʿ* events such as weddings, funerals, and religious festivals.

The *najaʿ* offered the pattern of co-residence that maintained the isolated and conservative life of the Nubians so that the foreigner could be identified easily. Although there was no structural plan, the *najaʿ* was a planned settlement, designed by its occupants according to their needs and culture. The placement of dwellings was based on family ties and the natural environment as well. It was customary for individuals to build their houses on any even tract of land adjacent to their relatives in order to have help nearby in case of need. The dwellings that made up the *najaʿ* followed the natural contours of the rocky fringes of the valley. The houses that overlooked the Nile were detached, or semi—detached, forming clustered terraces, while the houses that extended inland were freestanding and grouped together around an open area. Usually there were three or four houses in each of these arrangements. In the center of the *najaʿ*, there was a large open space where the mosque and few shops were located. The communal guesthouse (Arabic: *sabīl*) which was used for the *najaʿ* men gatherings, entertaining and housing male guests was also placed in the central open space.[13] Each *najaʿ* also maintained a cemetery and a shrine for the local saint in its hinterland.

The traditional house in Old Nubia was not only a shelter, but it was also the center of most Nubian rites. The design of the house had a strong connection to the natural environment, especially

13 El Hakim, *Nubian Architecture: The Egyptian Vernacular Experience*.

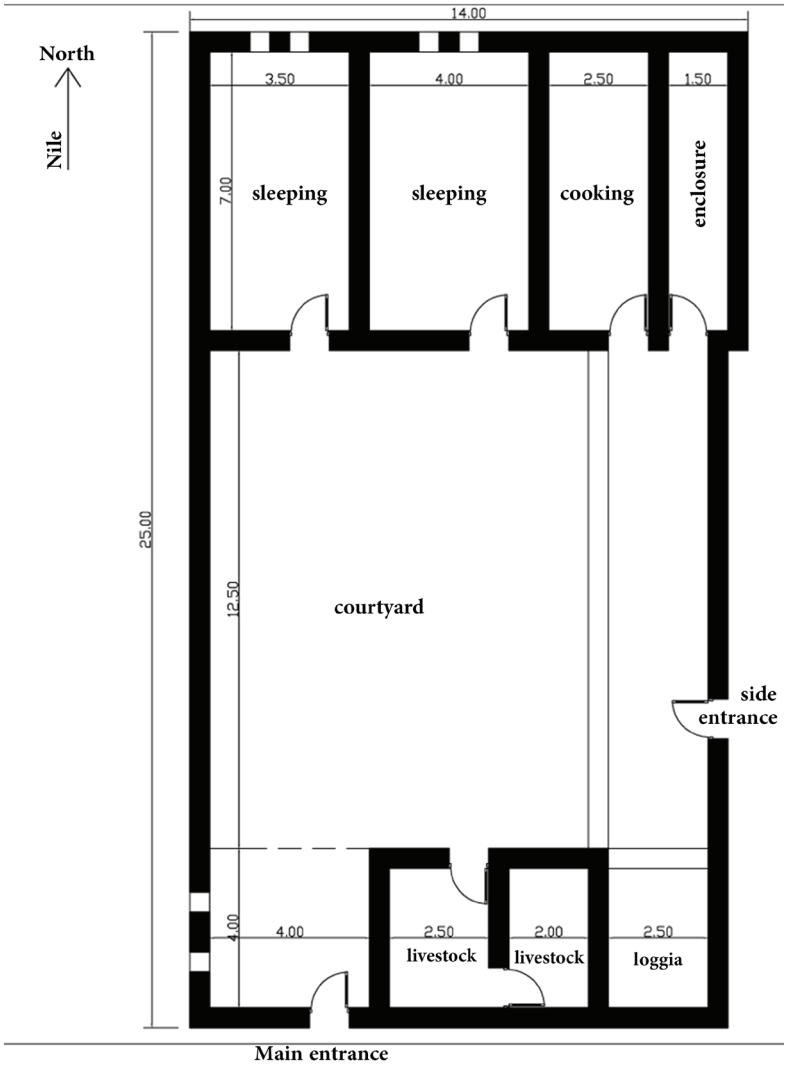

Figure 4.
Plan of a house in old Abu Hor in 1964. Graphic from Jaritz ("Notes on Nubian Architecture," Fig. 21 B5B).

to the topography and the climate. It also reflected Nubian social norms and the economic conditions of the proprietor. A typical house in old Abu Hor was built of fieldstone and plastered with mud and composed of a big walled courtyard with vaulted rooms built at the northern part of the courtyard, while the main entrance and the loggia were often located in the southern part and were open to the north in order to allow the best possible access to north wind. Livestock enclosures were built in the eastern or southern part of the courtyard, but with a separate entrance. Guest rooms were not com-

mon in Abu Hor houses. However, the entrance hall and the bench (Arabic: *masṭaba*) built near the entrance gate served the purpose of the guest room. The entrance hall was a transitional zone between the semi-public/male domain outside, and the private/female domain inside the house. The courtyard was a vital part of the traditional Nubian house. It was not just an empty space; rather, it was the hub for all female activity such as grinding cereals, baking *dōka* bread, and raising livestock. The courtyard also served as a guest area for women to meet, especially on the occasion of weddings, funerals, and other events.

Nubian ceremonies have always been the most noticeable and distinct feature of Nubian culture reflecting its rich and intermingled history through the ages. The ceremonies were of great symbolic importance in the social life of Nubians.[14] They were not just diversion from the routines of everyday life but also had the function of uniting the *najaʿ*, reinforcing ties within community, and maintaining its solidarity, as the ceremonies were occasions for reuniting migrants in different Egyptian cities with their relatives in the village. As Muslims, the Nubians celebrated the famous Islamic feasts, *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. In these occasions, the hamlet (*najaʿ*) was the ritual unit where all rites were performed. After performing the Eid prayer in the desert near the cemetery of the *najaʿ*, the men used to make a procession to each house in their own hamlet to congratulate their relatives for the feast. However, the Nubians had two ceremonies that can be considered as distinctively Nubian: the wedding ceremonies, and the local Islamic celebrations *mūlid*.

Wedding rituals varied between seven and fourteen days in length. The rituals used to start right after a new marriage was arranged and announced. All the women and young females living in the *najaʿ* were expected to assemble in the house of the bride's family to assist in grinding the wheat to make *shiʿērīyya,*[15] while the men would visit the groom to congratulate him. Before marriage, the bride, dressed in her bridal gown and accompanied by an elderly female relative, had to visit all the houses around the *najaʿ* to announce the day for starting the wedding ceremonies. In turn, the women offered gifts of *karej*[16] or a china plate. Then the bride would continue to visit all the major saints' shrines in the village and to *Abu Asha* shrine in the adjacent village, *Murwaw*. The groom, dressed in his bridal attire, carrying a whip, riding a camel had to visit all the guesthouses in the village to invite the men of other hamlets to his wedding.

14 Kennedy, "Introduction."

15 *Shiʿērīyya:* a vermicelli-like food with milk and sugar which was served as breakfast to the guests and to the bride and groom after the wedding.

16 *Karej:* Nubian traditional plates weaved of brightly colored palm fiber strips.

Figure 5.
A traditional wedding ceremony in old Abu Hor. (Hassan, *Abu Hor Baladna:* p. 158/b).

Wedding ceremonies were occasions for three days and nights of communal feasting and dancing in both the bride's and the groom's houses. On the morning of the wedding day (the third day of wedding ceremonies), the relatives and friends of the groom would bring his *ṣandūg jally*[17] and hung the *kojara*[18] in the bride's house. After the guests had eaten the *fatta* lunch at the groom's house, they would form a procession with the groom's family to the local shrine before going to the bride's house, passing in front of the *najaʿ* houses while sessions of singing and dancing were carried on accompanied by gunshots and joyful ululations of the women.

The local Saints (Arabic: *sheikh*) have an important ritual ceremony called *mūlid*, a festival day designated as the sheikh's birthday, usually on the fifteenth of the Islamic month of *Shaʿbān.* The *mūlid* was both a religious and social occasion that was celebrated by men, women and children. The whole *najaʿ* used to combine their financial resources in order to host the ceremonies, demonstrating their generosity and prestige among other hamlets. From the early morning of the *mūlid* day, boatloads of people from neighboring villages along with the village residents used to make long processions to the square of the saint's shrine, where the men were chanting *zikr*[19] and dancing the *kaff* dance,[20] the women were offering sacrificial sheep to be slaughtered, cooked and eaten in the communal feast afterwards, and the children were enjoying the joyful atmosphere and buying sweets and toys from travelling

17 *Ṣandūg jally:* A wooden box where the bride can store her clothes and perfumes. Its cover has a mirror on the inside, and bright-colored engravings of the groom's name, the date of the wedding, and Qur'anic verses are drawn on the box.
18 *Kojara:* A traditional Nubian curtain was hung across the room.
19 *Zikr:* The recitation of specific supplications to God and praises of the Prophet Muhammad.
20 *Kaff*: A traditional Nubian dance performed by men to the rhythm of *tar* and *noggar,* traditional Nubian drums, and the strong clapping of the dancers.

Figure 6. *Mūlid* celebration in old Abu-Hor. (2000: p. 157/a).

vendors. The people of Abu Hor celebrated eight *mūlid*s in different hamlets in the village, and five other *mūlid*s in the adjacent villages.

After displacement

On the 27th of December 1963, the displacement of the people of Abu Hor began to their village in New Nubia. There, the new Abu Hor is one of the five villages that are under the administrative local council of Kalabsha, a main village which provides the neighboring villages with social, educational and administrative services.

The new Abu Hor was planned according to a grid pattern; the main streets were oriented north-south and secondary streets crossed at right angles. In the first phase of resettlement, the houses were significantly smaller than in Old Nubia and were arranged back-to-back in long rows based on four prototypes of houses that ranged from one to four bedrooms. These houses were distributed according to family size; however, this arrangement ignored the socio-spatial structure characteristic of the Nubian villages before displacement. Relatives and the elderly who had lived nearby in old Nubia were allocated houses far from each other. And women, who were confined to their hamlet, found themselves surrounded by strange neighbors from other hamlets. For instance, my paternal grandfather (Sayed) was assigned a three-bedroom-house away from the house of his grandfather (Ali). Thus, the new settings in resettlement disturbed the established social fabric of the village.

Moreover, many families didn't even receive a house in the first phase of resettlement, so they had to live with relatives in their new small houses. This situation was further exacerbated after the 1967 war, when the migrant families who were living in Suez, Ismailia, and Port Said had to evacuate these cities and moved back

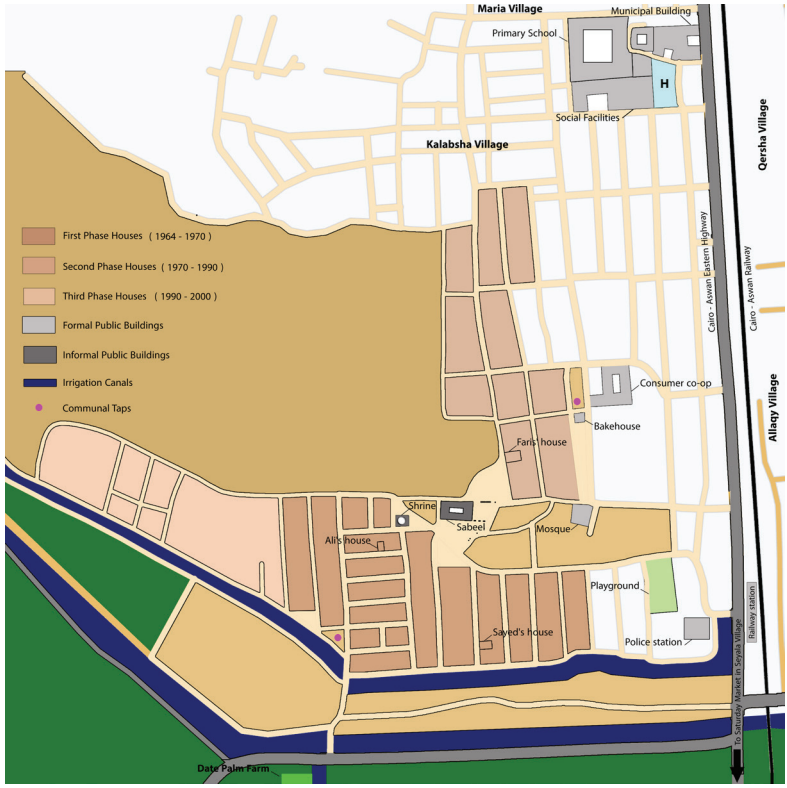

Figure 7. Layout of new Abu-Hor. Graphic: Amany Abdelsadeq.

to new Abu Hor to live with their relatives. This crowding had even worsened the living conditions in the new village.

In 1970, my mother's family received their house (Faris' house in Figure 8) as one of the second phase typical houses; a thirteen-by-twenty-meter house that consisted of a courtyard, two small bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The walls were made of limestone cut from nearby quarries, with 0.40m thickness and 3-meter height, while the flat roof was made of reinforced concrete to allow the building of a second storey using the bearing walls technique. However, this house form disregarded the climatic and social considerations characteristic of the traditional Nubian house. The kitchen was so small that there was no space to store food and supplies. The rooms were also much smaller than their house in old Abu Hor. The placement of the rooms along the southern side of the house allowed the heat to penetrate into them, in addition to the heat that came in from the uninsulated roof. Surrounded by other houses on three sides, the northern winds could not reach the house, making the living conditions intolerable during the summer months.

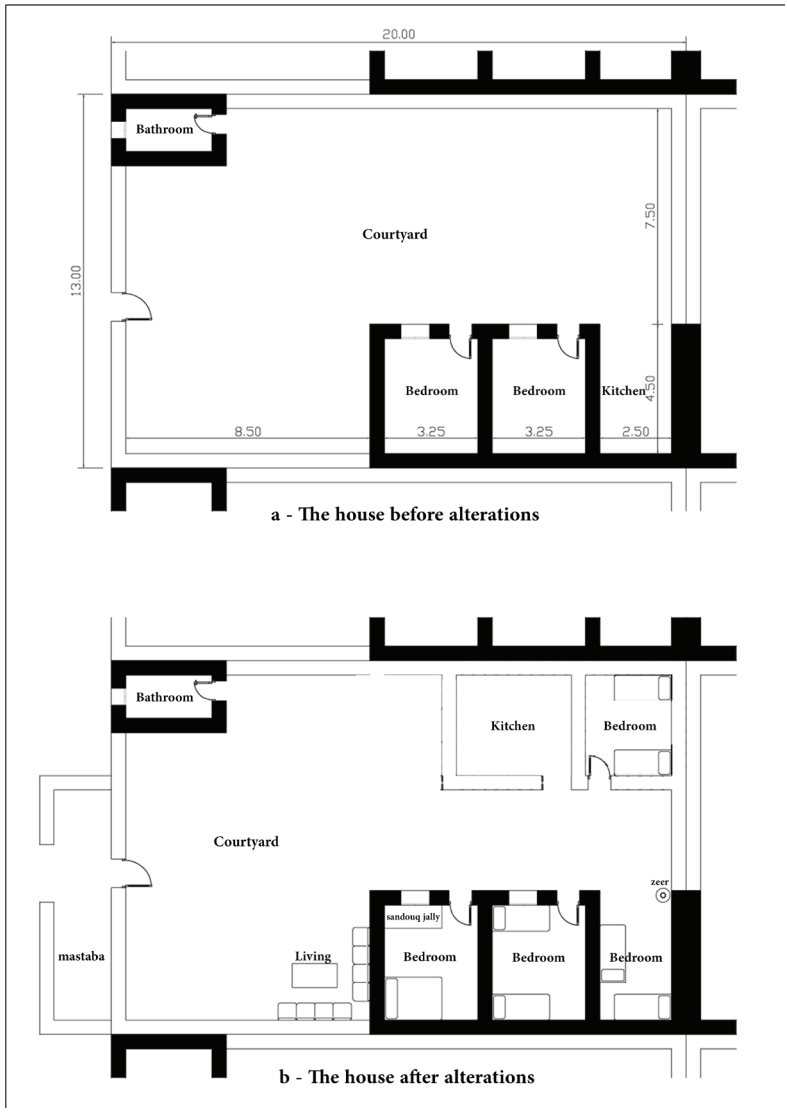

Figure 8.
My grandparents' house before and after alterations. Graphic: Amany Abdelsadeq.

They had to make alterations in the house in order to suit their way of life. A larger kitchen was built to be spacious enough for cooking and storing dried food and supplies, while the former kitchen had become a bedroom, in addition to building a new room for the children. As in Old Nubia, the façade was plastered with mud and whitewashed, and the low clay bench *masṭaba* was built in front of the house, adding more space for hospitality and neighbors' gatherings. Occasionally, they were spending their afternoons on their orchard, where they planted palm trees and a Roselle shrub.

The people of Abu Hor tried to recreate the sense of community in their new village through undertaking several cooperative projects. Every row of houses cooperated in cleaning the street and planting trees. The whole village collected money to build a communal guesthouse (*sabīl*) not only for accommodating visitors, but also as a gathering place where men can meet in the evening, hold public meetings, and gather in communal feasts in weddings and Eid al-Adha. Moreover, an elderly woman, who was a custodian of a saint's shrine in old Abu Hor, built a shrine in the new village.

Nubian ceremonies maintained their importance in the social life of the Nubians after displacement, but they have been adjusted to conform to the new place. For instance, the people of Abu Hor used to celebrate eight *mūlids* in different hamlets in the old village, and the other five *mūlids* in the adjacent villages. After displacement, they celebrated only one, the "Five Domes" *mūlid* in Murwaw village, which was celebrated on the fifteen of Shaʿbān by tens of *Kunūz* men, women, and children by chanting *zikr,* dancing *kaff,* and communal feasting as in Old Nubia. Rather than *mūlids,* the famous Islamic feasts; *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* gained a growing importance in Nubian social life after displacement. In these occasions, the men perform the Eid prayer in the open space near the mosque, then they make a procession to each house in the village to congratulate for the feast. Also, wedding customs were adapted for increased participation by all the village residents, friends from nearby villages, and migrant relatives in Egyptian cities. While the bride celebrated in her family's house with her friends and the women of the village, the groom held a wedding party for the men in the open space in front of the guesthouse (*sabīl*).

Discussion

Over centuries, Nubians lived in their hamlets and villages, enjoying their beautiful Nubia, being interrelated by their distinctive culture which grew out of time and place. They shaped their local environment around them by interacting with the landscape and leaving traces in it. Even after building the Aswan Dam in 1902 and the migration of Nubian men to work in Egyptian cities, they insisted to rebuild their villages at higher levels in the same locations. However, the Nubian social life with its infinite rhythm faced a sudden and dramatic transformation after the construction of the High Dam in 1964. The resettlement policies that relocated the Nubians placed them in a very different natural and physical environment: planned villages in the desert removed from the Nile. Displacement, as experienced by Nubians driven from their homes and from their home-

land, overturned the Nubian social organization. Such transformations in domestic space had an indelible effect on their culture.

The loss of a home due to displacement is such a socially disorienting, disempowering, and disruptive process that remaking one involves a lengthy effort with no obvious start or end point. The process of remaking a home entails more than building a physical place of shelter and finding a source of livelihood. It requires inhabitants to establish a feeling of being at home. This process of feeling at home involves four dimensions: a material place, a familiar landscape, a social world, and an emotional and existential place.[21]

The home is not only a place where individuals can satisfy their basic needs and protect themselves from harm threatening otherness (weather conditions, animals, or people).[22] It is also a place where dwellers can take control of their own boundaries and express their personal and social identities within them. Thus, people enact identification, ornamentation, and personalization processes to transform a house into a home.[23] According to Bourdieu, domestic space is appropriated by the resident according to a system of customs that are generated by past residential experience which he called "habitus." Thus, the acts of appropriation from past experience, like building a masṭaba and whitewashing the house, not only connect the inhabitants spatially with the places in which they dwell but also connect them with the past and the future.[24]

Regaining the sense of being at home was also achieved through familiarization with the new milieu, including its natural and physical features.[25] This is a process whereby strange places and people become familiar.[26] This process involved different scales of place, from the specific home to the whole village. The meaningless house is transformed into a home through daily practices and repetitive behavior in everyday life events. The actions create familiarity and therefore a sense of home.[27] Not only the house, but the streets, the mosque, the communal taps, the orchards all take on a sense of familiarity that makes one feel at home. Familiarity was created when people possessed a maximal spatial knowledge of the new village and its features became familiar through daily movement along the same paths.[28]

21 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."
22 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."
23 Korosec-Serfaty, "Experience and Use of the Dwelling."
24 Lawrence, "A More Humane History of Homes."
25 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."
26 Somerville, "The Social Construction of Home."
27 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."
28 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

As Korac stresses, "emplacement does not take place in a social vacuum; rather it occurs within the context of intra — and inter-group relations."[29] Creating a sense of home in new Abu Hor required reconstructing a social world in the new village based on shared traditions and values after centuries of belonging to *najaʿ* kin groups. Reconstructing this social world aimed to regaining a sense of belonging to a community, where "one recognizes people as 'one's own' and where one feels recognized by them as such."[30] Through everyday social practices, visiting and chatting with neighbors on *masṭabas,* the people of Abu Hor could create new social attachments within the place of resettlement, thus, creating a sense of home. Building the village guesthouse (*sabīl*) was another way the people of Abu Hor could reconstruct their social world.

Displacement involved separating from a place that Nubians described as "homely," a place where they had felt emotionally embedded. Displacement was an experience full of emotional distress; whether grief for the place left behind, the struggle of living in the present or worrying for the future. This emotional distress of being displaced remained until people were able to remake emotional attachments in the new village. However, the reconstruction of the emotional feeling of being at home did not happen automatically; for a long time, people continued to reflect on differences between the old Abu Hor and the new village.

The people of Abu Hor could reconstruct the emotional feeling of being at home by replicating their social and cultural traditions of Old Nubia in the new village, such as life-cycle rituals and celebrating religious ceremonies. Although the new setting lacked the geographical features in which these traditions were practiced — the Nile, hills, old shrines, and so on — creativity and imagination helped them to reproduce cultural traditions by evoking the landscape that they were forced to abandon. As Obeid explains "what seems like a yearning for the past can contribute very much to the creation of the present and the future."[31]

Conclusion

For more than fifteen centuries, Egyptian Nubians had lived in isolated villages on the banks of the Nile, surviving the harsh environment and the competing empires, and had slowly developed a distinctive culture that successfully responded to numerous crises. However, the building of the Aswan High Dam and the subsequent resettlement of Nubians in a desert habitat has been the greatest

29 Korac, *Remaking Home*, p. 42.
30 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement," p. 470.
31 As quoted in Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement," p.473.

shock to their culture that has been characterized by continuity and change. Yet, Nubian culture did not collapse by the backwaters of the High Dam, the vitality and flexibility of the Nubians helped them to adjust to the different natural and social milieu while retaining a strong sense of their historical and cultural identity. This research illustrated the varied strategies undertaken by Nubians to regain their sense of being-at-home in new settlements. These strategies included house alterations, symbolic recreation of places depicting places in Old Nubia such as the shrine and the community guesthouse, practicing Nubian rituals, and celebrating religious and social ceremonies. All these strategies were significant in transforming the unfamiliar resettlement place into a home.

Indeed, this research does not aim to romanticize nor to underestimate the precarious circumstances of Nubian displacement. Instead, the intention of this research is to acknowledge the significance of the contributions by Nubians to produce alternative meanings despite the modularization of their new top—built environment. Rather than associating the Nubian displacement merely with loss and passivity, this research discussed the resiliency and the spatial practices through which Nubians could contribute to processes of homemaking and (re)territorialization on different spatial scales.

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Nubian Women's Bridal Rooms

Armgard Goo-Grauer

This essay deals with the Nubian tradition of particularly decorating one room in the house, solely to be used by the bride and her husband after marriage. They adhered to this tradition before the flooding of Nubia due to the Aswan High Dam, which caused the exodus of the Nubian people from their villages more than half a century ago. This custom is now totally obsolete.

While some of Nubia's antiquities could be saved from the flood of this dam, the homeland of the Nubians vanished without much attention by the global community. Between 1963 and 1964, about 100,000 Nubians of Egyptian and Sudanese nationality had to be evacuated. Their villages drowned in the waters of the huge lake, and their unique decorated mud brick houses and wall paintings vanished as well. This very subject I discuss in detail in my book "The Colors of Nubia", to be published by the AUC Press, Cairo and New York, 2025.

I carried out field studies in former Egyptian Nubia in the early 1960s, with a particular emphasis on women's house decoration, sharing the life of Nubian families, which allowed me to get an idea of women's day-to-day life during the last period in the ancestral setting. In the beginning of 1964, I participated in the involuntary resettlement of the Egyptian Nubians to the area of Kom Ombo, about 50 km north of Aswan, the *Tahjīr,* the term the Nubians mainly referred to their exodus.[1]

1 In the spelling of Nubian words and Arabic loan words I follow Gertrud von Massenbach who was my Nubian teacher. She conducted pioneering work on the Kenzi Nubian language considered by the majority of scholars to be the most comprehensive and thorough investigations in this field. Regrettably, the existing literature and the maps of the region do not match on the spelling of toponyms, which leads to much misunderstandings. To avoid confusion, I had to find a plausible and consistent spelling system for the Nubian place names (districts, villages, and hamlets). The best way to do this seemed to be based on the meaning of the toponyms, for which I used the linguistic material of Gertrud von Massenbach (1933 and 1962) and Junker and Schäfer (1932). I also oriented myself according to UNGEGN 1986, United Nations 2006, and Bell and Sabbar 2017.

Figure 1. Nubian women in front of a decorated entry. Koshtammne, W. Neja Hamadāb/ Katabāb, 1963 (Photographed by the author).

The substitute villages in New Nubia with cramped and monotonous dwellings in the middle of a barren desert which the Nubians received for their former spacious homes triggered a shock and did not at all correspond with what the official propaganda had led people to expect. The *Tahjīr* turned out to be a traumatic social and cultural incident, the adverse impacts of which still manifest themselves today.

Nubians had already experienced resettlement as a consequence of earlier dam constructions in 1902, 1912, and 1933. Although these earlier constructions were not nearly as ambitious in their extent as the Aswan High Dam of the 1960s, they had required villages to be rebuilt further inland and had caused the loss of vast stretches of agricultural land. The result was the forfeiture of livelihood. Consequently, since the beginning of the 20th century, Nubian men had been obliged to migrate to the Egyptian cities where they worked mostly in the service sector. Their remittances supported the families back in the villages. They themselves could return home only rarely — usually once a year.

Figure 2.
House entry, decoration with lime and washblue. Toshke, W. Neja Seidāb qibli, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

Due to the extensive male labor migration many of the isolated Nubian villages, especially those in the northern Kunuzi region, were populated predominantly by women. They were the ones who carried the full responsibility for the household routine, raising the children, and caring for the elderly as well as tending the few remaining fields and livestock. Also, they crafted furnishings and utensils of Nile mud, weaves, and basketry. Their creativity found foremost expression in the outstanding Nubian house decoration.

Women pursued fantasies in the design of their bridal rooms. These accomplishments contributed significantly to a female Nubian identity.[2] Women also followed traditional practices of folk religion, perpetuated a rich oral literature, maintaining and passing on the Nubian language, and achieved generally a remarkable degree of self-determination, especially in comparison to the peasant women of Upper Egypt.

While men constructed the Nubian houses there was one chamber in all houses, which carried female handwriting. This chamber was the so-called bridal room, *arūsana kā.* In the Fadija area, the bridal

2 Goo-Grauer, "House Decoration in Egyptian Nubia Prior to 1964."

Figure 3. Decoration with baskets in a barrel-vaulted bridal room. Shellāl, Bijje island, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

room was called *diwān;* Mahgoub refers to it as *"diwāni"* the bridal hall.[3]

The bride had in the time preceding the wedding the task of decorating this room in her paternal house or compound, which would be the couple's private quarters and bedroom for a while. They lived there for at least forty days or until the first child was born. Sometimes this arrangement lasted for years. The husband's income determined if and when he could install a living space for the young family at or near his parents's compound. While staying with the in-laws, the bridegroom was considered a guest of the bride's parents.

The bride was eager to decorate the *arūsana kā* and to show her inventiveness and creativity. For an outsider who had the opportunity to visit a Nubian bridal room in the1960s, this proved a remarkable experience. One was transported into a fantastic realm of colors and forms. The experience had a mysterious character because very little light entered the room through the narrow

3 Mahgoub, "The Nubian Experience," p. 146.

Figure 4.
Young girl, Wadi el Arab, E. Neja Salahāb, 1963 (Photographed by the author).

ventilation slots — *tagā* — high on the walls just below the ceiling. The place was confined, as a bridal room in the Kenzi area rarely exceeded ten square meters. Especially so, since the two obligatory furniture pieces of any Nubian house — the marital bed and the bridal chest — were placed in the bridal room and took up a good portion of the floor space, leaving the walls and the ceiling as the main loci for the overwhelmingly abundant decoration. Bridal rooms could have larger dimensions in the Fadija area, where houses generally were more spacious.

In contrast to the two-dimensional wall paintings, the bridal room decoration is probably best termed as an assemblage, bringing to mind the realizations associated with this term in the visual arts of the works famously created by Picasso, Duchamp, and Dubuffet. A Nubian bride worked on these assemblages for weeks, if not months, before the wedding feast. They included a wide range of objects which she prized as valuable and of individual significance, ranging from items of artful handicraft to *objets trouvés*, found objects that are aesthetically pleasing. As one's eye adjusted to the dim lighting, one could see that these objects were deliberately

Figure 5. Bridal room with pleated mats, baskets, a gun, photos, and various small plastic objects, from the ceiling suspended slings with enamel bowls. Umbarakāb, W. Neja Siukutti, 1963 (Photographed by the author).

and ingeniously arranged, some given weight over others in the foreground or background.

Their small size enhanced the effect this room made on a visitor. Whereas generally in Nubian houses — especially the huge compounds with their ample yards — rendered an impression of space and vacuity, being devoid of furniture or things standing and lying around, the plenty and abundance of objects in the *arūsana kā* overwhelmed.

The custom of creating and decorating a bridal room possibly had a long tradition in Nubia. Formerly, however, the bridal rooms were not located within the house or compound. The community set them up at a distance from the hamlet to provide privacy for the newlyweds once the nuptial ceremonies were completed. Yet, these were not permanent buildings but small temporary structures, huts made of acacia branches or palm fronds and furnished with homemade mats. In light of the description given by Samuel Ali Hussein, who lived as a farmer in the district of Abu Hor between 1885 and 1896, the interior decoration of these structures closely resembled the bridal room custom of the 1960s. Hussein mentions

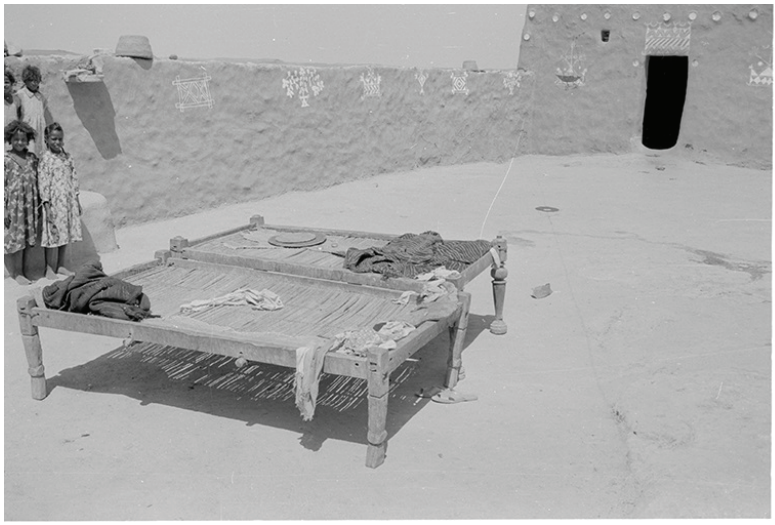

Figure 6. Angarē beds with mesh. Abu Hor, E. Neja Khor Rahma, 1962 (Photographed by the author).

that a "variety of all sort of things" was displayed in the bride's hut, naming these as round, shield-shaped baskets (*tagaddi*); hampers (*kobōta*); mats (*nibid*); hanging baskets (*tagaddig*); plates (*sīni*); and mirrors (*koyalli*).[4]

The remarks of Burckhardt indicate that the custom existed in the wider region already at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He wrote, "The ladies of Damer adorn their sitting rooms with many large wooden bowls or dishes hung against the wall like so many pictures.[5]" Since Damer is located a bit south of Nubia, we can assume that the habit of bridal room decoration was adhered in Nubia.

In the 1960s, when Nubian men were predominantly absent as labor migrants, this room was, in effect, the wife's private domain, her sanctuary, so to speak, serving as the reception place for female guests to whom the place was proudly presented. Male visitors and outsiders had no access to it. Though the rich decoration all over the room suggested an impression of plenty, the fitments of the bridal room consisted mainly of the two furniture pieces — a bed and a chest — installed at the wedding.

The traditional bed was a locally-made *angarē,* a kind of divan, but it could also be an imported iron bedstead, even a four-poster. Commonly, Nubians slept on home-made mats placed on the ground — these could also be laid on top of the *angarē*. Sometimes a cotton mattress was used. The *angarē* beds had a frame from acacia wood and a covering with a taut mesh of palm fibers or palm bast:

4 Schäfer, "Nubisches Frauenleben," pp. 233 — 4.
5 Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia,* p. 270.

Figure 7.
Wooden chest: *sandūg*. Shellāl, Seheel Island, 2013 (Photographed by the author).

ashmān. When the mesh wore out, it could be easily renewed or replaced with wooden boards. Bigger households would have several of these *angarēs*, which were brought during the daytime into the courtyard to be used for sitting. Yet, the usually decorated marital bed always remained inside the bride's room.

The second furniture item in the bridal room, a wooden chest, housed the bride's trousseau. Called *sandūg iskandarāni* or "Alexandrian chest," since it formerly came from there, it served as a lockable storage space for personal belongings such as jewelry, clothes, blankets, and treasured possessions. Things needed for the wife's daily grooming, such as homemade massaging ointment (*dilka*) and the antimony eye makeup (*nidmee*), were also kept in the chest or on a little wall shelf.

The chests always featured some carved decorations with symmetrically arranged motifs, such as stars, stylized flowers, and pairs of animals, often lions facing each other. Wooden dowry chests were customary throughout the Islamic world from Pakistan to Morocco and from the Arabian Peninsula to Zanzibar. As likely prototypes for these chests, the wooden boxes of early Portuguese sailors have been suggested.[6]

While the bridal room assemblages were a central feature of all Nubian houses, they were especially exuberant in the Kenuzi region.

6 Stone, "The Art of the Dowry Chest," pp. 24ff.

Figure 8. Mats, round baskets, and hanging slings in a bridal room, under the ceiling rolled up mats, stored on pegs. Mediig, W. Neja Sebue, 1963 (Photographed by the author).

At large, the room's walls were first covered with handcrafted braided mats, to which flat round baskets were attached. These two formed the main artisanal product all over Nubia.[7]

They both played an important role during wedding feasts, being fabricated in advance by the bride and her female relatives. The mats would be spread on the ground for guests to sit on as they paid their respects during the week-long celebrations. A mat might also be placed on an *angarē,* serving as a bench for the bridal pair. The shield-shaped baskets were primarily used as lids to cover the food served on large trays but formed also a popular wedding gift. Following the wedding, the mats would be removed from the ground, rolled up, and hung on pegs right below the ceiling in the bridal room. As all the decorations of the bridal room, they likely had some symbolic significance because it was customary in some areas for the wife to remove them when her husband died.[8] Also, colorful flag-shaped hand fans were hung on top of the mats and amongst the baskets.

7 Wenzel, *House Decoration in Nubia,* pp. 25ff; p. 27, fig 4; p. 28 plate 9; p. 29, fig 5.
8 Kennedy, *Nubian Ceremonial Life,* p. 235.

Figure 9. Hand fan, cotton and palm material, Kenuzi region, 1962 (Photographed by the author).

Primarily, objects which the bride considered as special and worthy of being shown were displayed in this room. These comprised a bizarre collection of objects peculiar in Nubia, sometimes stranded goods washed up along the banks of the river or things brought back by the men from their workplaces. Though the latter items had had some utility in the Egyptian towns, they were of no use in the Nubian households. Here the women to whom these things appeared wondrous subjected them to a kind of recycling as they hung them on the walls as decorations.

Sometimes an object would be left unchanged in its original form, but sometimes it would be skillfully altered. Electric bulbs — inoperable in Nubia, which had no electricity — and burned-out batteries were carefully embedded into a mesh of colored glass beads. The empty cigarette packs from the heavily smoking men were cut open and sewed with needle and thread into multi-faceted cardboard stars. Old tin cans showing their labels were flattened and nailed to the wall next to discarded parts of transistor radios or other appliances. Colorful photos from magazines were galleried like precious images. Thus, the picture of a white chicken could be hung beside that of a sparsely-clad cinema star, which seemed odd in the Nubian context, considering the widely-held norms of female decency. Some items came actually from the trash left behind by the international archaeological missions sent to Nubia in the late 1950s and early 1960s to rescue the monuments threatened by the High Dam.

Together with this mixture of decorative and, in the Nubian context, seemingly exotic items appeared a multitude of miniature

Figure 10.
Bed coverlet decorated with small handmade objects. Magazine clippings and photos are displayed on the wall above the bed. Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

handmade objects intended as good luck charms. They were no larger than five-to-fifteen centimeters and hung either on the walls or suspended from the marital bed's coverlet.

Handcrafted in needlework, these items were made of leather or colorful plastic sheeting, available in Egypt since the 1950s. They could represent scorpions, human hands, flowers, *aruusa* dolls, or small-scale replicas of household equipment, such as mats, bags, baskets, and water containers. There were miniaturized fly swatters, purses, boxes for eye makeup, and triangular stuffed cushions, termed *sambuska*.

Other items could be small geometrical forms such as rings, circles, and squares, some of which were considered to have special protective powers.

Whereas the walls of most bride's rooms were decorated with objects and not painted, there existed some exceptions, two of which are shown. The house in Fig. 17, from Dehemiit, E. Neja Kogge, looks ruined as it had already been vacated for the exodus. The roof with the valuable wooden beams has been removed, and as well the decorative interior fitments. The motifs rendered in this room were narrowed down to those items of which the prototypes

Figure 11. Small aruusa figure, plastic material. Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

were substantially displayed on the walls: handmade mats with ornamental patterns. In this way, a real mat could be hung up on top or beside a painted one, the difference between a real object shown on the wall and its reproduced image merging, thus fulfilling the elsewhere realized function of the painting as a placeholder.

It is interesting to note, however, that the discussed small objects which the women fabricated for the equipment of their bridal rooms could reappear as motifs women painted on the walls of the men's guest room (see Fig. 18).

The impression of abundance in a bridal room was intensified by the way that the space overhead was also filled. Hanging down from the ceiling were slings made of braided wool (*shālōg*) or leather (*soleddi*), the cords strung with snail shells and cowries (*nerre*).[9]

Suspended in these slings were dozens of empty enamel bowls, porcelain plates, or gourds (figures 19 and 20). Although food and utensils were stored in the cooking area in the same manner, the sole intention here was decoration.

9 Schäfer, "Nubisches Frauenleben," p. 308; Wenzel, *House Decoration in Nubia*, p. 27, fig 4; Fernea et al., *Nubian Ethnographies*, pp. 39—40.

Figure 12.
Bird, plastic material, Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

At times ostrich eggs imported from Sudan — to which magical powers were ascribed — could be seen in such a sling. In addition to the room's decoration and simultaneously crowding it even more were wooden bars (*wāwir*) suspended horizontally by ropes from the ceiling and used as racks to store and display the bright clothes and scarfs of the women.

Even though the bride's room was distinctly the domain of females, men had at least a symbolic presence here in the form of their swords and guns, which were presented on the walls, complete with their rows of cartridges. The swords used in the men's ceremonial dances and carried at a wedding, and guns cherished for occasional hunts in the desert or for shooting in the air at festivals. They had often been in the family's possession for generations. The guns usually dated back to the time of the Mahdi at the end of the nineteenth century.

But besides their weapons, men were present moreover in black and white photos on the walls (Figure 21). These photos had been taken by street photographers in the Egyptian towns where the men worked, showing them dressed either in European fashion or with

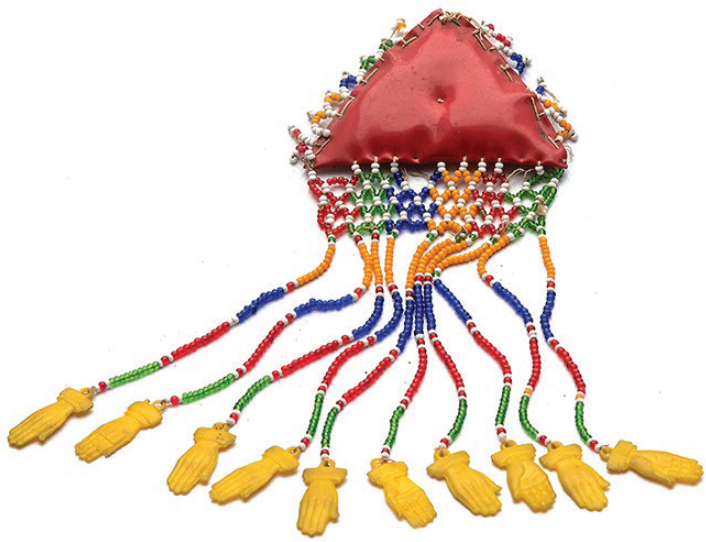

Figure 13. Protective sign, sambuska, plastic material. Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

the local long shirt-like gown, *galabieh.* Some of these shots dated from the 1930s and 40s. Street photographers offered their services in Aswan since World War I and could still be seen on the Corniche in the 1960s. They were equipped with huge cameras mounted on wooden tripods in front of which the customer would pose on a stool, usually sitting stiffly with both hands on the knees and presenting an earnest and dignified facial expression, while the photographer disappeared behind his camera under a huge black cloth to take the shot.

The phenomenon of the design and decoration of the former bridal rooms, where Nubian women transformed foreign objects into new creations, might be understood as an example of how the Nubians, since distant times, have adopted outside influences into their culture, appropriating these impacts to such an extent that they seemed to be characteristic for Nubia, a feature reappearing also in other realms of Nubian culture.

After the exodus of the people to the new settlements near Kom Ombo, the tradition of decorating the bridal room was given up.

Figure 14. Star sewn from flattened cigarette boxes. Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

In the new villages the everyday experience was totally different from the one before and life proceeded under changed premises: running water, roads, electricity, refrigerators, schools, telephones, and eventually TV — all unknown in Old Nubia — became matters of fact. In addition, many consumer goods became available and money started to play a more significant role than before.

Many of the former customs were given up. And the skill of how to fabricate craft articles were lost because the material for it was no longer available. For example, the handmade mats, previously an essential item of Nubian houses, were replaced by plastic items. The two traditional pieces of furniture, the *sandūg* chest and the *angarē* bed, were considered old fashioned and not used anymore. Instead, heavily upholstered armchairs, massive sofas, buffets, tables, and other items of modern-day furniture were used. These pieces are ornately adorned, often with gold trimmings, as was popular throughout Egypt. The often-oversized items narrow down the small rooms, where relatively low ceilings enhance the impression of confined space.

Figure 15. Protective sign, busuq, cotton material, ornamented with cowry shells. Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

The reason for the abandonment of the bridal room decoration might partially have been the absence of adequate space, but also and probably more so due to the now changed female state of mind. This mental change can be attributed to girls' education. The strong cultural influences of the Egyptian mainstream must also be considered.

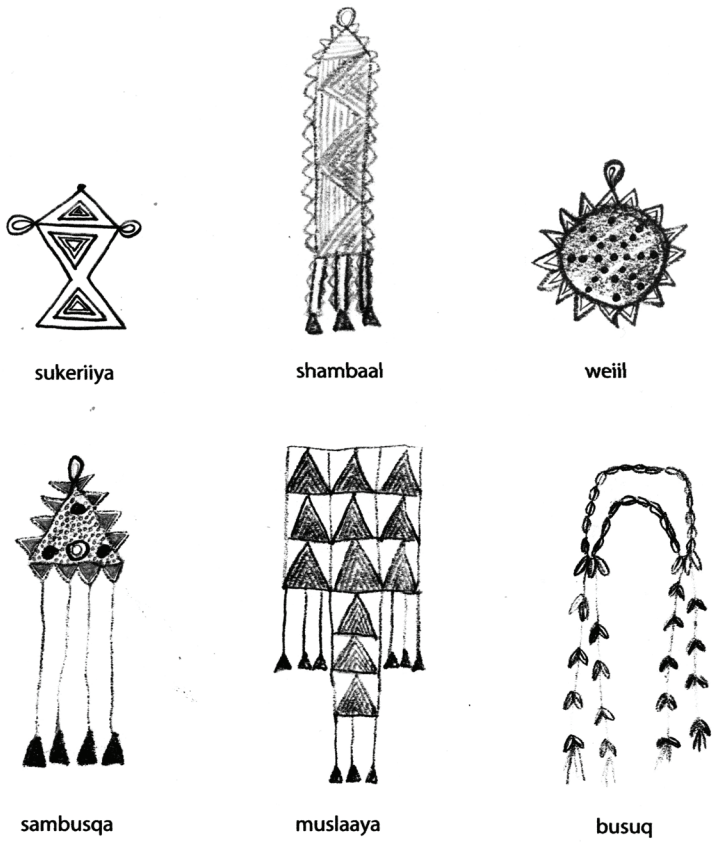

Figure 16. Various small protective objects. Toshke, W. Neja Dukki Daur, 1964 (Drawn by the author).

Figure 17.
A dismantled bride's room with painted praying mats. Dehemiit, E. Neja Kogge, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

Figure 18.
The same protective objects, which adorned in real the bride's room, appear here as painted motifs in a guest room. Gurte, W. Neja Affedunya, 1963 (Photographed by the author).

Figure 19. Enamel bowls in slings suspended from the ceiling, on the four posters a lace curtain to which protective small plastic objects are pinned. Shellāl, Bijje island, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

Figure 20. Double hanging slings, made from wool, with enamel bowls in a barrel-vaulted bridal room. Kalābshe, 1963 (Photographed by the author).

Figure 21.
Photos of male family members on the wall of a bridal room. Shellāl, Bijje island, 1964 (Photographed by the author).

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Houses of Egyptian Nubia: West Aswan — Then and Now

Anne M. Jennings

Egyptian Nubia is that area of Nubia which extends from the First Cataract, near the town of Aswan, to the Sudanese border. The people in this area call themselves Kenuz and speak the language which they call Kenuzi or Matoki.[1] Traditionally, their economy involved a combination of subsistence farming, animal husbandry, and date production on a narrow strip of land next to the Nile. The erection of the first dam in 1903, and subsequent elevations in 1913 and 1933, crippled their agricultural system. Because of the difficulties of farming the land, Nubian men had sought employment outside of Nubia for centuries, returning to their homeland only periodically. Those who remained in the villages — mostly women, children, and old men — were dependent upon remittances from these migrants.

Most of the Kenuz were relocated when their homeland was flooded because of the elevation of the Aswan Dam in 1964. At the time of relocation, approximately 70,000 Egyptian Nubians (both male and female), were living outside of Nubia.[2] Many Nubians returned to their homeland when the relocation began, and approximately 50,000 were resettled in the thirty-three villages built to accommodate them near the town of Kom Ombo, thirty miles north of Aswan. This was named New Nubia.

Not all the Nubians moved from the Aswan area, however. Several villages, situated north of the High Dam, were in no danger of inundation and so were not evacuated. In this photographic essay, I wish to show my photographs of some of the homes that the people who inhabited the hamlet (*naja'*) of Gubba, in the village of West Aswan, were living in during the time I lived there. My first field trip was in 1981, and the house that I lived in, as well as most others of the village, was built of clay/mud bricks that had been

1 Rouchdy, "Languages in Contact."
2 Fernea and Kennedy, *Initial Adaptations to Resettlement*.

dried in the sun, and then plastered over with more clay to make a smooth surface for painting. This photo shows the houses in one of the *nujūʿ* of West Aswan, with its mudbrick walls and barrel vault roofs. These roofs allow the air to circulate freely within the homes, keeping the inhabitants cool.

Within the *najaʿ* of Gubba, houses have been built in such a way that every nine or ten of them surrounds a large open area (*mulāga*). Doors open onto this square, which may have as its focal point a large tree, or a small kiosk selling canned milk and candy, or a water spigot.

Walls that are made of mud brick absorb the heat of the sun throughout the day. In the winter, this is delightful, but during the summer months the out-of-doors is more comfortable. Both men and women congregate upon the *mastabas* — benches of smoothly-plastered clay that are built along the fronts of the outside walls — in the evenings, to share tasks and good conversation, and to catch the evening breezes that seem to freshen just in time.

The traditional Nubian home has an inner courtyard which is quite wide, with a large sandy floor. Traditional celebrations and ceremonies are held in these courtyards, so they must be quite large.

The Nubians of West Aswan, as well as those living in surrounding villages such as West Saheil and Hessa, are quite dependent upon tourism. Foreign tourists are brought into the home (usually just the courtyard area), served tea, and allowed to wander around the area so that they can see what a traditional Nubian home looks like. It is hoped that they will also buy souvenirs.

The women of the family may also contribute to the household income by drawing tattoos with henna.

In 1981, I rarely saw two-storey houses, but there were a couple, made of bricks rather than mudbricks. These walls were strong enough to support a second storey.

When I returned to Gubba in 1986, I saw several new houses which departed from the plan of the more traditional homes. Newer houses were built of stone and concrete, although they were still plastered over with clay and painted. They were much less comfortable than the older houses, as stone tends to be hotter than adobe, and they were roofed with tin. Nevertheless, stone and concrete walls are stronger, and enabled the families to add a second storey to the home.

By 2007, the newer houses had become larger and more comfortable, with tiled floors throughout the house, and with glassed-in windows and air-conditioning. They also have large

kitchens with Western-style stoves and refrigerators, and bathrooms with toilets and showers.[3]

By that time, the villagers were making quite a bit of money from tourism, so many of their houses were geared towards welcoming tourists. This is such a home in Gubba.

Restaurants, such as the one in Figure 12, which has been constructed in an old Nubian house, as well as the one in Figure 13, have been built in West Aswan to increase tourism.

Other contributors to this volume have discussed the shock and disappointment that those who were relocated felt when they beheld their new homes. The houses of New Nubia appear to have been based upon an architect's assumption about the kinds of homes that the Nubians had lived in. It seems to me that the planners of New Nubia had never actually visited Aswan or any of the Nubian villages surrounding it, as evidenced by my photographs of their houses, but had assumed that the Nubians lived the same way other Egyptian farming people lived. Due to racism and indifference, the houses of New Nubia were built in a style that was completely unrelated to the houses of Old Nubia.

3 Jennings, *Nubian Women of West Aswan.*

Figure 1.
The houses in one of the *nujūʿ* in West Aswan, with their barrel-vault roofs. (Jennings, 1981).

Figure 2.
Within the *najaʿ* of Gubba, doors open up into the square (*mulāga*). (Jennings, 1981).

Figure 3.
Many walls display a representation of Al Buraq, the mythical being who, according to legend, carried Mohammed to heaven on her back. (Jennings, 1981).

Figure 4.
Some houses have paintings on their walls, indicating that the owner has made the pilgrimage to Mecca (Jennings, 1981).

Figure 5. Most houses have benches of smoothly plastered clay (*mastabas*) that are built along the fronts of the outside walls. (Jennings, 1981).

Figure 6. These *mastabas* are gathering places for men and women at the end of the working day. (Jennings, 1981).

Figure 7.
The wide courtyard of a traditional Nubian home, where celebrations and ceremonies are held. (Jennings, 2007).

Figure 8.
A tourist group being welcomed into the courtyard of a Nubian house. (Jennings, 2007).

Figure 9.
Women of the family may also contribute to the household income by drawing tattoos on tourists with henna. (Jennings, 2007).

Figure 10.
A house of the older style (Jennings, 1997).

Figure 11.
A two-storey house made of bricks rather than mudbricks (Jennings, 1997).

Figure 12.
This home is offered as a Bed & Breakfast for any tourist who wants to spend more time in Nubia. (Jennings, 2007).

Figure 13.
A cafe which has been reconstructed in an old Nubian house for the tourist trade (Jennings, 2007).

Figure 14.
A restaurant which was built in West Aswan to invite the tourist trade. (Jennings, 1997).

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Stereotypes and Negative Indexes of the Nubians in Egypt

Asmaa Taha

For generations, Nubians (both Fadija and Kenuz[1]) have been stigmatized and ridiculed in the Egyptian media. Nubian speakers of the Fadija and Mattoki vernaculars in Egypt are associated with unintelligible or incompetent Arabic, dark-skinned people, working lower-class jobs, and so on. Among the negative indexes used in Egyptian media to refer to Nubians are /barbarj/ "barbarian," /bijurtˁun/ "speaking gibberish," or /bijitkallim ʕarabi mikassar/ "speaking broken Arabic." These pejorative and prevalent images are extensively emphasized by the media. These constant negative indexes have compelled some Nubians to speak only Arabic with their children to avoid mockery, prejudice, and discrimination.

Despite the stigmatized portrayals, there are Nubian speakers who have a positive attitude towards learning their mother tongues to preserve their languages, identities, and ideologies. The importance of learning Nubian languages at home is essential for preserving not only linguistic diversity, but also the cultural and ideological foundations that are deeply embedded in Nubian homescapes. Nubian houses and households are not just physical spaces; they are living embodiments of history, identity, and social organization. By teaching and learning these languages within the home, Nubians can maintain a direct connection to their heritage, ensuring that their unique cultural practices, ways of life, and worldviews are passed down to future generations.

Learning the mother tongue in the home environment reinforces the multisensory, embodied experience of Nubian homelife, which this volume explores in relation to material culture, architecture, and everyday practices. Language acts as a bridge that ties the past to the present, allowing individuals to engage with their ancestral

1 The Fadija primarily live in the southern villages of Aswan, as well as in other parts of Egypt and speak Nobiin. In contrast, the Kenuz mainly reside in the northern villages, but also live in other areas in Egypt and speak Mattoki.

knowledge and traditional ideologies, even in times of political and social change. By continuing to use Nubian languages in domestic settings, speakers are not only preserving their linguistic heritage, but also reinforcing their identity within the larger narrative of Nubian resilience, especially during periods of systemic transformation and resettlement. Thus, language learning at home becomes a vital practice in sustaining the cultural continuity explored throughout this volume.

Nubian homes serve as a critical locus for shaping a positive Nubian identity. Within the home, Nubians hear and learn their native language, embrace their culture and traditions, and develop a deep sense of pride in their heritage. The home functions as a cultural anchor, preserving Nubian identity across generations. Through daily interactions, stories, songs, and communal practices, Nubian children are rooted in their cultural traditions, which they carry into the wider society. This foundation is essential for combating stereotypes and fostering a positive self-image, empowering Nubians to assert their dignity and rightful place within broader Egyptian society.

This paper examines data from the media, including films and soap operas, to explore the indexical attitudes towards Nubians established in the media showing recurring patterns and mechanisms utilized in their metalinguistic discourse representations. To investigate the metalinguistic discourse of Nubians in the media, I utilize the indexicality theory.[2] More specifically, I demonstrate different linguistic elements that are accompanied by noticeable patterns such as dress code, work type, skin color, and character traits. Media makers utilize these linguistic resources to create and disseminate indirect negative racial and social indexes by alluding to linguistic and non-linguistic attributions that are featured in their films or soap operas. In addition, this article presents discussion questions and analytical data showing how Nubians themselves perceive these media productions and how they feel about the associated stereotypes. Finally, it examines how Nubian speakers react to the negative indexes and how they are attributed to their language and culture, highlighting positive movements and portrayals of Nubians. The need for fluency in Arabic, a skill that carries power and prestige in several domains such as education, religion, and public media, cannot be denied. However, public awareness and counterstereotypes are urgently needed among Egyptians — Nubians, and non-

2 Indexicality theory explores the semiotic connections between linguistic forms and their social meanings, emphasizing how language both reflects and shapes social identities and ideologies. The theory highlights the importance of context, ideology, and cultural beliefs in shaping the relationship between language and social identity.

Nubians — to construct positive stances and provide fair and authentic representations of the Nubian language and culture.

Background

This paper adopts the analytical framework of Bassiouney,[3] a distinguished sociolinguist and award-winning novelist, to examine the stereotypes of the stigmatized /sˤiʕi:dj/ dialect (Arabic spoken in the southern part of Egypt[4]) in Egyptian media. The study explores how visual, linguistic, and literary resources are used by media producers to construct these portrayals. Inspired by Bassiouney's analysis, I offer an analysis of the negative media portrayals of Nubians in Egypt highlighting the visual, literary, and linguistic resources as well as other patterns that manifest the negative indexes found in the media productions. While the visual resources refer to dress code, skin color (make-up used to deliberately darken skin color, for example), and overall demeanor, the literary resources refer to characters' traits, recurrent names, lower-class job associations, and subordination. The linguistic resources or metalinguistic discourse discusses the salient features of Nubian characters portrayed by the media, including the heavy accented Arabic and syntactic and phonological errors.

In this paper, the terms "Nubians and Nubian language" are mainly used to refer to both Fadija and Mattoki Nubians in Egypt. Although the term "Nobiin" refers to speakers of Fadija (Halfawi, Sikkut, and Mahas are dialects of Nobiin spoken in Sudan and Fadija is spoken in Egypt), it is exclusively used in this case to refer to Fadija speakers in Egypt as this article focuses on the media in Egypt.

Arabic is the official language that is valued and treated with high esteem in Egypt. Cairene Arabic (CA) is the most prestigious of all Egyptian dialects due to the fact that Cairo is the largest urban center; the powerful dialect is used in the media discourse. As Bassiouney puts it:[5]

> Cairo has been the focal point of the political and cultural renaissance throughout the Arab world. Along with the central role played by Cairo both in the political arena and in the sphere of culture, came the rise of CA as the code that indexes power, as well as cultural and political superiority and authenticity in Egypt."

3 Bassiouney, *Constructing the Stereotype*. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Reem Bassiouney for her advice and guidance during brainstorming.

4 In this paper, International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) transcription of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic is used. Please check appendix 2 for details. This paper uses /j/, which can be represented as /y/ in other systems.

5 Bassiouney, *Constructing the Stereotype*, p. 7.

On the other hand, the Nubian language is ranked as lower status than Arabic in Egypt. In fact, the extensive stigma attached to Nubian speakers may be the reason why some Nubians speak Arabic with their children or refrain from teaching their native Nubian language. Yet even the Arabic of Nubian speakers is highly stigmatized and ridiculed due to the associated indexes utilized by media makers. However, there are Nubians who take pride in speaking both Arabic and Nubian languages. Abou-Ras, a Nubian academic researcher, asserts that her participants have positive attitudes towards both languages, yet they favor learning and using Nubian because it is the mother or heritage language.[6] Additionally, there is widespread awareness among Nubians of the importance of maintaining and reviving their language. Several initiatives, including educational centers and YouTube channels, exist to teach the Nubian language and highlight the culture. Just to name a few, the Nubian Educational Center (NEC)[7] and the Nubian Language Society (NLS)[8] support the education of Nubians and help preserve their language and culture. The NEC, located in Egypt, has been actively involved in teaching the Nubian language and preserving Nubian cultural heritage. They offer language classes and cultural programs for both children and adults. Similarly, the NLS, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., is dedicated to promoting, documenting, and raising awareness of the Nubian language and culture.

Media impact on societies

In this section, I discuss the influence and impact of media on societies and the role the Egyptian media plays in establishing stereotypes and negative images of Nubians in Egypt. Media has become an effective and powerful tool to fuel disruption, rumors, misunderstandings, mockery, and discrimination. As Sánchez Macarro, a linguist, puts it "as individuals, we are all influenced, our opinions shaped, reinforced and altered by our exposure to the media."[9]

In describing the media discourse, O'Keeffe, a notable applied linguist, characterizes it as a

6 Abou-Ras, *The attitude of Egyptian Nubian University Students towards Arabic and Nubian Languages*.

7 The NEC has an active Facebook group which can be accessed at the following link: https://www.facebook.com/share/ufuiPKpvFA4Chu9p/?mibextid=qi2Omg (accessed December 2024).

8 The NLS website can be accessed at: https://nlsnubia.com/ (accessed December 2024).

9 Sánchez Macarro, *Windows to the World,* p. 13.

> public, manufactured, on-record, form of interaction. It is not ad hoc or spontaneous (in the same way as causal speaking or writing is); it is neither private nor off the record.[10]

The fact that media discourse is not spontaneous, but rather manufactured and purposefully chosen tells us that these negative images of Nubians are not random; they reflect specific ideologies as well as political and social stances. The fact that media production is public tells us how quickly and widely these stereotypes of Nubians are constructed and established. By using a critical discourse analysis to look at the media discourse portraying Nubians, we can see the social power abuse, dominance, and inequality exercised against Egyptian Nubians. Bassiouney argues that

> public discourse, especially in the media, not only reiterates shared belief systems and ideologies, but also constructs and controls access to them.

In order to construct the /sˤiʕi:dj/ stereotype, media reiterates indexes of the region and its speakers."[11] The process of stigmatization and derogation against Nubians and their language in media discourse reflects discrimination and unequal treatment of Nubian speakers on political and social levels. Recurring patterns and ideologies used to represent Nubians in movies, soap operas, and other media productions negatively influence and shape how Nubians are perceived by non-Nubian Egyptians eroding the cultural, social, and global identity of all Egyptian citizens. Participant 18, a thirty-year-old female, stated that she felt the brunt of the media's negative indexes and experienced racist and teasing responses while at school.[12]

The present author, a Nubian applied linguistics researcher, asserts that media in Egypt has played a significant role in perpetuating negative stereotypes, such as depicting Nubians as speaking incomprehensible Arabic and occupying lower-class jobs.[13] The case of Nubians' portrayal in the media is not only associated with fluency and job opportunities, but with direct insults and affronts. As a Nubian, I myself experienced situations of mockery and teasing by non-Nubian classmates at schools in Egypt. Moreover, the word /barbarj/ "barbarian," is a pejorative term extensively used in soap operas when referring to Nubians, in addition to the

10 O'Keeffe, "Media and Discourse Analysis," p. 441.
11 Bassiouney, *Constructing the Stereotype*, p.3.
12 Detailed information about the participants and their backgrounds can be found in Table 1.
13 Taha, "From Nub to Dahab," p. 118.

constant prevalent images of Nubian characters as backward, less sophisticated, naïve, and slow.

Media influences people and their beliefs; conversely, the media itself is being influenced by several social, political, economic, and social values. Particular ideologies are propagated in the media industry and these values or agendas are carefully chosen and play a crucial influential role in public discourse. Fairclough, an emeritus linguist and pioneer in Critical Discourse Analysis, asserts that

> media output is very much under professional and institutional control, and in general it is those who already have other forms of economic, political or cultural power that have the best access to the media.[14]

In other words, the media industry is controlled by certain institutions that have political, cultural, and economic power and immense influence. According to Fairclough, the media is a powerful tool that can shape government and parties, and influence "knowledge, belief, values, social relations, and social identities."[15] Thus, the media reflects our societal and cultural values and ideologies.

Data

This article examines data spanning seventy years, including movies, soap operas, cartoons, music video clips, and documentaries. Notably, many of the documentaries were filmed in peoples' homes, providing an intimate perspective on Nubian life. I posit that producers utilize three resources to portray Nubians in movies and soap operas: linguistic resources, visual resources, and literary resources. The examples in this article are derived from well-known Egyptian movies and the /Bakka:r/ cartoon (an Egyptian production by the Radio and Television Union, broadcast on Channel One, following the adventures of a young Nubian boy, his pet goat, and his friends) where stereotypical linguistic errors pronounced by Nubian characters are prevalent. In addition to analyzing the metalinguistic discourse in movies and cartoons, the study includes insights from nine discussion sessions held with twenty-two native Nobiin speakers. These discussions explore how Nubians themselves perceive and respond to negative representations and stereotypes in Egyptian media. The discussions also delve into Nobiin speakers' reflections on their Arabic fluency and proficiency and how it is depicted in the media and by filmmakers and screenwriters.

14 Fairclough, "Language and Globalization," p. 40.
15 Fairclough, "Language and Globalization," p. 2.

Theory and Methodology

The indexicality theory serves as an essential theoretical framework for this study. It involves understanding how utterances or signs are interpreted within the context of their use focusing on how meaning is shaped by social and cultural factors. By examining how specific linguistic features or signs point to social identities or cultural backgrounds, indexicality helps in analyzing how media representations reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes, particularly in the portrayal of marginalized groups like Nubians. Through this lens, the study explores how language and indexes are used to create or perpetuate social hierarchies in media. By examining linguistic choices, visual symbols, and cultural references, the study can reveal how media reinforces existing power dynamics and marginalization. For example, certain language patterns or character portrayals may elevate dominant social groups while depicting marginalized groups in subservient roles, thus reinforcing stereotypes and maintaining the status quo of social inequality. This analysis highlights the role of media in shaping perceptions and sustaining social hierarchies.

Ochs, a linguistic anthropologist, views indexicality as a spoken property through which socio-cultural contexts (such as gender) and social activities (such as gossip) are formed by taking particular stances that are indexed through the language chosen.[16] In other words, indexicality is interpreted in light of the semiotic associations between linguistic forms, social meanings, and identities. Ochs identifies two types of indexicality, direct and indirect, and each performs different functions in discourse. According to Ochs, direct indexicality refers to interactional stances, including evaluative stances, while indirect indexicality points to social stances.[17]

Among those who refer to an index as contextualization cues are Hughes and Tracy, discourse analysts, emphasizing that signaling context and reinforcing pragmatic signs are crucial for effective communication. They define indexicality as "the function by which linguistic and nonlinguistic signs point to aspects of context."[18] According to Hughes and Tracy, indexicality is closely related to deixis and they could even be "sometimes interchangeable," but they consider deixis to be a specific type of indexicality, which helps participants navigate the oral or written discourse frame through understanding references. Indexical and cultural contextual cues are essential to properly interpret inferences and understand the ideologies behind them, Johnstone et al., a group of linguists,

16 Ochs, "Indexing Gender."
17 Ibid.
18 Hughes and Tracy, "Indexicality," p. 1.

categorize indexes into two types: referential and non-referential.[19] On the one hand, referential indexes include pronouns and demonstratives i.e. the term denotation is based on the utterance context. On the other hand, non-referential indexes are linguistic forms that convey or construct social meaning. They consider "social meaning to be a "concept that encompasses matters such as register (in the narrow sense of situation appropriateness), stance (certainty, authority, etc.), and social identity (class, ethnicity, interactional role, etc.)."[20] They also explain further that the relationship between linguistic forms and social meanings can be manifested at different levels of indexicality order. They consider the first-order indexes as unnoticeable and unintentional because they are common among people, unlike second-order indexes that are both noticeable, recognized, and intentional because of their association with social meanings and shared ideologies. An example of the first-order indexes is a regional vowel variation, while the stereotypes and negative images of Nubians in the movies and soap operas are examples of second-order indexes.

In his seminal work, Silverstein, a leading linguistics anthropologist, explores the order of indexicality, distinguishing between first and second-order indexes. He notes that the second-order indexes are "creative or effective" and potentially can have ethno-metapragmatically driven interpretation.[21] This interpretation allows speakers to not only presuppose meanings based on existing social structures or stereotypes, but also to actively reshape and reinforce these meanings in dynamic, context-specific ways. In other words, the presupposed indexical meanings align with a higher metapragmatic order and are "creatively" transformed to perpetuate new or existing social narratives. Silverstein's theory of indexicality offers a useful framework for understanding how media representations of Nubians both draw upon and reshape existing social stereotypes. By focusing on second-order indexes, we gain a deeper understanding of how linguistic and visual elements — such as accents, racialized portrayals, or specific character traits — are not merely reflective of preexisting social hierarchies but are strategically manipulated to reinforce and sustain these hierarchies. This framework reveals how media creators play an active role in constructing and perpetuating narratives of marginalization, embedding them within the cultural fabric in ways that maintain power imbalances. In the context of Nubian representation, second-order indexicality is evident when filmmakers and screenwriters overexaggerate certain linguistic features — such as accents,

19 Johnstone et al., "Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of 'Pittsburghese,'" p. 81.
20 Ibid.
21 Silverstein, "Indexical Order and the Dialectics of Sociolinguistic Life," p. 194.

grammatical errors, or mispronunciations — and link them to negative stereotypes like servitude, simplicity, or inferiority. By doing so, these linguistic forms become socially charged and reinforce existing racial and social hierarchies. For example, the media's portrayal of Nubians through broken Arabic or exaggerated accents is a deliberate act that imbues these features with racial and social implications. This transformation from unnoticed linguistic markers to socially meaningful symbols is central to how media perpetuates harmful stereotypes and embeds them into the cultural imagination.

Eckert, a prominent sociolinguist, emphasizes the close connection between speakers' ideologies and stylistic practices (both linguistic and non-linguistic) utilized to construct worldwide views and social meanings.[22] I argue that the stylistic choices — such as dark skin portrayals, costumes depicting servants and doorkeepers, bright clothing, heavily accented Arabic, and numerous fluency and accuracy errors — are deliberate and conscious decisions made by producers and media creators. These choices are designed not only to reflect and reinforce their ideological perspectives, but also to cater to audience expectations and stereotypes. By perpetuating these negative portrayals, media producers exploit prejudices and biases to attract larger viewership and generate higher profits. These portrayals also reflect the wider media assumptions of Nubians' social and political roles in the Egyptian society.

This article focuses on the second-order non-referential indexes that producers and media makers use to cast Nubians as backward, less sophisticated, naïve, and dark-skinned. Their stereotypical linguistic features, physical traits, and character traits are consistently tied to pejorative images and second-order indexes, depicting Nubians as low-income, lower-class workers from inferior communities. Characters in movies and soap operas who play Nubian roles often use specific linguistic resources and salient visual and literary resources alongside direct and indirect negative indexes to reinforce these stereotypes. These social meanings are highly marked, deliberately crafted, and reinforced by the media's portrayal of Nubians in the Egyptian culture. However, Nubians have responded by creating positive personal and social stances against these negative portrayals, speaking out in condemnation, and initiating their own channels and venues to authentically represent their identity and culture. These efforts are discussed in detail later in the article, particularly in the "Moving Forward: What Can Be Done?" section.

22 Eckert, "Variation and the Indexical Field."

Established negative indexes and stereotypes

This section outlines the established negative stereotypes of Nubians through media including movies, soap operas, and songs. I highlight the salient visual and literary features of Nubians that carry second-order indexes.

After investigating various Egyptian soap operas and films in terms of character roles, traits, dress codes, and visual features, I argue that consistent patterns and attitudes shape the use of these literary and visual elements, along with linguistic features. Nubians, in particular, are often depicted in subordinate and inferior roles, typically portrayed in lower-class jobs. Throughout these media productions, they frequently appear as minor characters working as servants, waiters, cooks, doorkeepers, or housekeepers. Moreover, they are often ridiculed or criticized by both their employers and peers. Egyptian television dramas commonly cast Nubians in these roles, subjecting them to mockery and insults. Similarly, many Egyptian films, especially those from the mid-20th century, portray Nubians in menial positions, reinforcing negative stereotypes. These portrayals contribute to the marginalization of Nubians and perpetuate harmful stereotypes, underscoring ongoing issues with representation in the media.

Two recent soap operas stand out as exceptions to the general portrayal of Nubians. The first soap opera is /ʔil-ʔasˁdiqa:/ "Friends," a 29-episode series that streamed in 2002. In this show, the Nubian character was not treated as an equal by one of the friends, but rather as an outsider included only because of a mutual friend who did business with him. Despite this, there was a notable positive shift in the portrayal with other lead characters enjoying his Arabic and Nubian songs. In episode 12 of the "Friends" soap opera, the show featured a pretend Nubian wedding as a performance for tourists, intended to promote one of the lead characters' businesses by highlighting the cultural diversity of Egyptians and showcasing a unique authentic tradition.[23] Overall, two of the main characters spoke very highly of Nubians, expressing respect and appreciation for both the people and their culture.

The second soap opera, /ʔil-muɣannj/ "The Singer," which was aired in 2016, features a famous Nubian actor as the main character, with the entire storyline revolving around his life. Although it did not achieve the widespread popularity of other soap operas, it stands out for its authentic portrayal of Nubian culture. The series vividly depicts Nubian daily life and homescapes, showcasing traditional Nubian houses, the Nile River, iconic songs, palm trees and dates,

23 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koEE24Pc02E (accessed December 2024).

Figure 1.
The screenshot shows a non-Nubian actor named Soliman Eid in blackface pretending to be Nubian. Source: *ʕija:l ħabiba* "Love Birds" (2005).

boats, and musical instruments. These cultural elements offer a rich and genuine portrayal of Nubian heritage. For instance, episode 5 poignantly depicts the forced relocation of Nubians from their homeland villages, with characters dressed in traditional Nubian clothing, sorrowfully leaving their own homes.[24] This moving depiction highlights the cultural and historical significance of the events, providing a glimpse into the struggles and resilience of the Nubian people, while grounding the narrative in real experiences and traditions.

In relation to character traits, Nubian characters are usually depicted as less sophisticated than non-Nubian characters, yet they are sometimes more honest and trustworthy. However, they are mainly portrayed as naïve, slow, backward, and unintelligent, who are easily manipulated and tricked with intelligibility issues or disabilities. The names of the characters are mainly *Othman, Idris,* or *Seliman.* In the /ʔil-fa:nu:s ʔas-siħirj/ "The Magic Lantern," a Nubian waiter fails to recognize that two pretend waiters, who are trying to retrieve magic lanterns, are not Nubians.[25] The two characters who only used a single word in Nubian /maskagna/ "hello," then make totally random sounds that do not belong to any language whatsoever. When asked if he understood the other two waiters, the Nubian waiter explains: "I am not a fool, they are not from my hometown, but they are coming from a high honorable place. I know, I am not a fool." Despite the waiter's confidence, he was easily tricked, and too ignorant to know if others were speaking his language.

In movies and soap operas, literary elements are closely intertwined with visual and linguistic resources to reinforce stereotypes. As for the visual resources, Nubian characters are

24 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYfif7sAnpw&list=PL4ZQAyKFoBc-GzgfgRN8M9HJe152WYJ9D&index=5 (accessed December 2024).
25 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLW3gDcVzak (accessed December 2024).

depicted with dark skin, and in several cases, actors use blackface to inaccurately represent Nubian skin color. Both male and female characters are typically shown with dark skin and are often dressed in the uniforms of cleaners or waiters, or men wearing the traditional white /galla:bi:jja/ "a loose-fitting garment." Figure 1 provides a typical example of a blackfaced Nubian character in movies and soap operas. The scene is from the movie /ʕija:l ħabi:ba/ "Love Birds," which streamed in 2005. In the movie, the Nubian character is constantly subjected to ridicule and insults due to stereotypical portrayals of dark skin by other characters. Throughout the film, numerous derogatory references are made toward the Nubian character and his family. Shockingly, some of these discriminatory remarks come from the character himself, who is impersonating a Nubian man in blackface. In one particularly offensive scene, the actor Ramez Galal addresses the Nubian character, saying, "Come on, you don't want your heart to be black, just like your face."[26] This film contains numerous racist and discriminatory indexes, perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Similarly, media makers explicitly and frequently make several direct insults and negative indexes about Nubians by hurling clear and affronting insults and derogatory references. In the soap opera /nikdib law ʔulna: ma: binħibʃ/ "We'd Be Lying to Say We Didn't Love," streamed on TV in 2013, a major female actress, Ragaa Al-Giddawy, refers to the Nubian male character and his family as "barbarians" saying: "Listen, I won't let you marry my daughter unless you bring all your barbarian folks right here to ask for her hand in marriage."[27] In another soap opera /ħuru:f in-nasˁb/ "Letters of Fraud", released in 2000, the actor Hisham Selim impersonates a Nubian by wearing waiter apparel, darkening his face, and referring to himself as "Othman Abdel El-Basset, the one Egyptian barbarian."[28] In a movie produced in 1998 /sˁiʕi:dj fi:l-ga:mʕa ʔil-amri:ki:jja/ "An Upper-Egyptian at the American University of Cairo", the actor Mohamed Henedi, tells a minor Nubian female character: "No need to turn the light off. I cannot see your face already. Your face is as dark as the night."[29]

These examples highlight how media productions reinforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes about Nubians through both visual and literary elements. The use of blackface, derogatory language,

26 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9ViDzUnJUU (accessed December 2024).
27 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G-5gKXOkNQ (accessed December 2024).
28 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irloGB1-N6A (accessed December 2024).
29 He was not a non-Nubian Egyptian actor born in 1887. He was one the earliest actors to stigmatize and grossly exaggerate Nubians in movies and plays. His style of portraying Nubians, that includes ridiculing their Arabic fluency and accuracy, is still used in Egypt. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAPYImuAK_g (accessed December 2024).

and offensive depictions further marginalize Nubians, casting them in demeaning and inferior roles.

These portrayals are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of racial discrimination in media, where negative depictions of Nubians are normalized and repeatedly portrayed. This ongoing misrepresentation embeds harmful stereotypes into popular culture, contributing to the wider social marginalization of Nubian communities.

Having established the connection between the visual and literary resources used to propagate these stereotypes, I will now turn to the analysis of linguistic resources and metalinguistic discourse. This next section will explore how specific linguistic choices, such as intentional grammatical or pronunciation errors portrayed by characters impersonating Nubians, are used to ridicule and reinforce negative stereotypes. These deliberate linguistic inaccuracies often serve to mock Nubians, further entrenching racial and social hierarchies. By examining these elements, I aim to offer a nuanced understanding of the role language plays in the construction and perpetuation of these harmful portrayals.

Metalinguistic discourse: examples and analysis

This section examines the metalinguistic discourse or linguistic resources of Nubian characters focusing on the stigmatized linguistic and pronunciation errors portrayed and derived from movies and soap operas. In particular, I analyze several examples of stereotypical language errors produced by characters portraying Nubians in movies and cartoons.[30]

Actor Ali Kassar[31]

(1) a. **ʔinta ʔismak jasmi:na?*
Q name-your.M PR
"Your name is Yassmina?"

b. *ʕumra-k-ʃ ʃiribi-t*
ever-you.M-NEG drink-PST.2.M.S
nabiz zajj di?
wine.M like this.DEM.F
"Haven't you ever drunk wine like this (before)?"

30 Glossing abbreviations used in this paper: 1- first person; 2-second person; 3- third person; IMP- imperative; PR- proper noun; DEM- demonstrative; PRS- present; PST- past; FUT- future marker; SG- singular; PL- plural; PREP- preposition; NEG- negation; WH.Q- WH question; Q- question particle; QUANT- quantifier ; PCP- participle; PM- possessive marker; M- masculine; F- feminine; VOC- vocative.

31 He was a non-Nubian Egyptian actor born in 1887. He was one the earliest actors to stigmatize and grossly exaggerate Nubians in movies and plays. His style of portraying Nubians, that includes ridiculing their Arabic fluency and accuracy, is still used in Egypt. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAPYImuAK_g (accessed December 2024).

In example 1a, a Nubian character is talking to a female character in Arabic, but he mistakenly addresses her using a masculine possessive form, highlighting his perceived poor command of Arabic.[32] Similarly, in example 1b the Nubian character demonstrates a lack of accuracy by using a feminine demonstrative with a masculine noun which is ungrammatical.

Actors Gomaa Edriss and Ali Oraby[33]

(2) a. *ʃu:f iʃ-ʃutˤ il-ha:mis fi ʔe:h!*
check.2M.S-US round-M the-fifth in.PREP EXCLAM
"check what is in the fifth section for us!"

b. **ilʔasanser mitˤatˤtˤal ja: usta:z*
the elevator broken VOC HON
"The elevator is broken, Sir."

inn kunt-i mistaʔgel-a itˤlaʕj
if was.2.F.S hurry.2.F.S go-2.F.S
ʕala rigl-ikj
on.PREP foot-your.F
"If you are in a hurry, go on your foot."

c. **ana ni-ʃu:f ʕa:wiz ʔe:h*
I PRS.1.PL-see want.PCP.M.S what
"I (will) see what they want."

d. *ʔe:h illi ʕatal-u? *ana lazim*
WH.Q which break.it I have.to
je-ruħ l-il-waki:l
PRS.3.M.S-GO to.PREP-the-agent.M
"What caused it to break down? I have to go to the agent."

Beyond gender agreement errors, the portrayal includes fluency errors such as pronunciation mistakes. For instance, in example 2a, the character fails to produce the /x/ sound, so he replaces it with the /h/ sound i.e., /ʔil-ha:mis/ "fifth' instead of /il-xa:mis/. Additionally, in the same example, the Nubian character mispronounces the vowel in the word /iʃ-ʃut/ "section" instead of /iʃ-ʃotˤ/. In example 2b, multiple accuracy language errors are evident. First, the Nubian character addresses a group of people using a singular masculine

32 Arabic is a grammatically gendered language in which verbs, nouns, and adjective always assign either a male or female case based on the person addressed. For example, nouns and adjectives or nouns have to agree in gender.

33 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_18m7gWKQM (accessed December 2024).

form *usta:z* "sir" before switching to a singular feminine form instead of the appropriate plural. Examples 2c and 2d are ungrammatical as the Nubian character uses plural and third person masculine forms, respectively, when he refers to himself.

Actor Sayed Sulieman[34]

(3) a. **huwa fe:n ja: ʔaxu:j:a*
is WH.Q VOC dear-my
ʕelbet il-saga:j:er
carton.F the-cigarette.F
"Oh my dear, where is the carton of cigarette"

w-il wala:ʕa bita:ʕ-u di
and-the lighter.F PM.M this.DEM.F
"And the lighter of his?"

b. **is-sitt ʕa:jiz-ak ruħ-i*
the-lady want.PCP.2.M.S go.IMP.F.S
ʃu:f-i ʕa:jiz ʔe:h
see.IMP.F.S want.PCP.3.M.S what
"The lady wants (to see) you.
Go, (and) see what she wants!"

In example 3a, the Nubian character is looking for his boss's cigarette and the lighter used a possessive marker that does not agree, gender-wise, with the noun it modifies. Similarly, in example 3b, the same Nubian character talks to a female co-worker about his employer who is a woman, but uses masculine forms (masculine participles), and hence, there is gender disagreement.

Further examples highlight systematic gender disagreement between determiners, quantifiers, and possessive markers and their modified nouns. Examples 4a, 4b, and 4c show such ungrammatical usage.

Actor Ali Oraby[35]

(4) a. **ana ma-nʕiraf-ʃ ʔaj: ħaga ʕan*
I NG-know.1-NG any thing.F about
mawdˁuʕ di
matter.M this.DEM.F
"I do not know anything about this matter."

34 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLW3gDcVzak (accessed December 2024).

35 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmgjwTZ6aRM for 4a; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryWp_nqybmI for 4b, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZF8dncakq7k for 4c (accessed December 2024).

b. **di bejt-na wi-ʔiħna ʕa:j:la waħid*
this.F house.M-our and-we family.F one.QUANT.M
"This is (like) our house. We are (like) one family."

c. *ʕagab-hum iʃ-ʃuɣl bita:ʕ-ak xa:les*
like-they the-work.M PM.M absolutely
"They absolutely like your (f) work."

Examples 4a, 4b, and 4c purposefully demonstrate the Nubian character's lack of accuracy and proficiency. In 4a, /mawdˤu:ʕ di/ "this matter," the feminine demonstrative does not agree with the masculine noun in gender. In contrast, in 4b, /ʕaj:la waħid/ "one family," the masculine quantifier does not agree with the feminine noun. In a similar way, the Nubian character uses masculine possessive markers when talking to his sister, rather than the feminine using possessive markers /bita:ʕik/ "your."

Actor Mohamed El Adendani[36]

(5) a. **ana bi-nraʃaħ il-ħag abdo ismail*
I PRS-elect.1 the-hajj PR PR
"I elect Hajj Abdo Ismail."

b. *qarrar-na lazem wi-ħatman*
decide.PST-us have.to and-definitely
ne-ʕmel waħid rubatˤaja
PRS.PL-form one.M gang.M
"We definitely decided (that) we have to form a *gang (union)."

c. *ana ʕa:jiz ne-ʕraf il-ʔwel*
I want.PCP.1.M.S PRS.PL-know the-first
"I would like to know first."

Example 5a shows a case of noun-verb disagreement, whereby the Nubian character uses plural verb conjugation when referring to himself. On the other hand, in example 5b, he chooses the wrong word i.e., using /rubatˤaja/ "gang" instead of /rabtˤa/ "union" as an example of his intelligibility and incoherence. Example 5c shows a grammatical error where the speaker uses the singular first person for the participle "want" followed immediately by the plural form of the verb "know," creating an awkward and inconsistent structure.

As we can see, all examples present syntactic disagreement (noun-adjective agreement, verb-noun agreement, demonstrative

36 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixZ9YtVLU3Q (accessed December 2024).

and pronoun disagreement) or phonological errors or idiosyncrasy, often accompanied by a heavy accent of Arabic. The question is, why these language errors in particular? There are two possible hypotheses or scenarios that explain the media fixation on these intentional metalinguistic discourse errors. The first postulation is associated with historical linguistic challenges. The earliest Nubians, often monolingual speakers of Nubian, who migrated to different areas in Egypt such as Cairo and Alexandria to look for job opportunities had some language difficulties when learning Arabic due to the influence of their mother tongue. For example, Rouchdy, a linguistic researcher, noted in her 1991 study, that non-competent Fadija bilingual speakers had a tendency to add the suffix -a to borrowed Arabic words such as /ani:da/ "stubborn."[37]

Nevertheless, do Nubians, considering all the generations that have emerged since the forced relocations because of the Aswan Dam construction in 1905, still face language proficiency and accuracy issues? Are Nubians today merely monolingual speakers of Nubian? Most Nubians today are bilingual speakers of Arabic and Nubian. Unfortunately, in some cases, they are monolinguals of Arabic. The Arabic spoken by Nubians varies regionally; for example, those in Aswan or Luxor commonly speak the *Seʕidi* dialect, while Cairo residents use the Cairene dialect.

The second hypothesis points to intentional stereotyping prevalent in the media. The portrayal of Nubians as "broken," flawed, unintelligible, faulty, or incompetent, coupled with a heavy accent, is deliberate and serves to reinforce stigmas and propaganda surrounding these media productions. These linguistic inaccuracies are not random; they represent recurring patterns in the language used by filmmakers and screenwriters. Such portrayals often go hand-in-hand with blackface and visual tropes that depict Nubians as belonging to a lower socioeconomic status. I believe that the second hypothesis provides a compelling explanation for the persistence of these stereotypes in Egyptian media. By amplifying these intentional errors, the media perpetuates widespread mockery, prejudice, and harmful representations of Nubians, further entrenching societal stigmas.

37 Rouchdy, *Nubians and the Nubian Language in Contemporary Egypt*, p.27.

Discussion data: Participants and Procedures

Table 1.
A table showing the participants of this study.

Group	Gender	Age	Education	City of residence
Participant 1	male	70's	BA	Cairo
Participant 2	male	70's	BA	Cairo
Participant 3	male	70's	BA	Dallas
Participant 4	male	60's	BA	Aswan
Participant 5	male	60's	PHD	Cairo
Participant 6	male	60's	BA	Aswan
Participant 7	male	60's	BA	Aswan
Participant 8	male	60's	MA	Aswan
Participant 9	female	60's	PHD	Cairo
Participant 10	male	50's	BA	Cairo
Participant 11	female	50's	BA	Aswan
Participant 12	female	50's	BA	Cairo
Participant 13	female	50's	MA	Aswan
Participant 14	female	40's	MA	Aswan
Participant 15	male	40's	BA	Riyadh
Participant 16	male	30's	BA	Cairo
Participant 17	female	30's	BA	Cairo
Participant 18	female	30's	BA	Dammam
Participant 19	female	30's	BA	Luxor
Participant 20	male	30's	BA	Dammam
Participant 21	male	20's	BA	Aswan
Participant 22	male	20's	BA	Cairo
Total (22)				
Native and heritage Nobiin speakers	8 females	3 in their 20's	2 PhD	9 in Cairo
	14 males	5 in their 30's	3 MA	8 in Aswan
		2 in their 40's	17 BA	2 in Dammam
		3 in their 50's		1 in Dallas
		6 in their 60's		1 in Luxor
		3 in their 70's		1 in Riyadh

A discussion was held with native Nobiin speakers to explore their perception of the negative indexes associated with themselves and the Nubian language in the Egyptian media. There were twenty-two participants: eight females and fourteen males ranging in age from twenty to seventy years old. All the participants were educated and held various higher education degrees (bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. qualifications). Responses were not anonymous, as identifying information was deemed beneficial for analyzing social

variables. Participants were recruited through the researcher's social networks (family, friends, and community members). All participants provided consent prior to the discussion.

Most participants reside in Egypt: eight in Aswan, nine in Cairo, and one in Luxor. Three participants currently live in Saudi Arabia and one participant lives in the United States. The majority of the participants are bilingual (fluent in both Arabic and Nobiin). Seven participants, however, are heritage speakers of Nobiin, meaning they understand Nobiin, but primarily speak Arabic. Table 1 provides details about the participants' background information.

The researcher showed each participant pictures of Egyptian movies, TV shows, songs, and documentaries. After presenting the image, the researcher asked indirect questions to let the participants talk about the pictures leading to their views about the Nubians' representations, their clothes portrayal and authenticity, the characters depicted, their roles, and skin color as shown in the Egyptian media (movies, soap operas, TV programs, songs, cartoons, and documentary movies). Open-ended questions were used to generate rich, meaningful responses and insights. The researcher always asked the participants to provide illustrations, examples, and/or clarifications. A discussion was held with Fadija Nobiin speakers to show how they perceive the negative indexes attributed to themselves and the Nubian language in the Egyptian media.

Discussion: Results and findings summary

To analyze the discussion data, I coded it and then created a graph for each question to organize and categorize the collected data visually. This section presents the study discussion results, their frequencies, and some of the participants' statements and opinions.

Early Nubian representations in the Egyptian media

The distribution of the first discussion question is presented in graph 3 in Figure 3. It reveals that there are twenty-one participants stating that the early representations of Nubians in the Egyptian media are discriminatory and prejudicial (95%), while one participant indicated that they were not intentionally belittling or undermining them (5%). Moreover, participant 12, a female participant in her fifties who lives in Cairo, added that the media, including movies, at that time was informative about Nubians and their lives. From her point of view, Nubians in these movies, for example, were portrayed as trustworthy people who are famous for their excellent personal hygiene and honesty.

Figure 2.
An example of the pictures shown to the participants to start the discussion. The image depicts two characters — Ismail Yassine on the right and Abdel Ghani El Nagdi on the left — who painted their faces black to impersonate Nubians. Source: /ʔil-fa:nu:s ʔas-siḥirj/ "The Magic Lantern' (1960).

On the other hand, Dr. Mohammad Ali-Bik[38] asserts that media makers consistently presented a stereotypical exaggerated image of Nubians portrayed as less sophisticated and naïve, even though, in reality, they are recognized within the Egyptian society for their honesty and straightforwardness. He further stated that Egyptian media has marginalized Nubians in many ways, including associating them with exaggerated negative portrayals, and primarily depicting them in low-income jobs such as doorkeepers and workers in houses, hotels, and restaurants. This association stems from the business goals of media producers. By perpetuating harmful stereotypes and sensationalized depictions, producers attract a larger audience, which in turn boosts viewership ratings and advertising revenue. These portrayals create a dramatic narrative that appeals to viewers' preconceptions and biases, making the content more marketable. Consequently, media producers benefit financially from the

38 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my uncle, Dr. Mohammad Ali-Bik, Professor of Mineralogy and Geochemistry at the National Research Centre in Egypt, for his invaluable insights and feedback. I am also deeply grateful to my family members and friends who assisted with the survey study. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my late brother, Taha Taha (d. 2023), whose input and responses to the discussion questions were foundational to this work.

Furthermore, I am incredibly grateful to the editorial team for their unwavering support throughout this journey. Anne Jennings provided continuous instrumental guidance, tips, and recommendations, particularly during the initial data collection phase in 2022. Dr. Anna Boozer dedicated significant time to reviewing multiple versions of this paper, providing thorough and invaluable feedback. Lastly, I would like to thank Alexandros Tsakos for his considerable efforts in enhancing the quality and presentation of this manuscript.

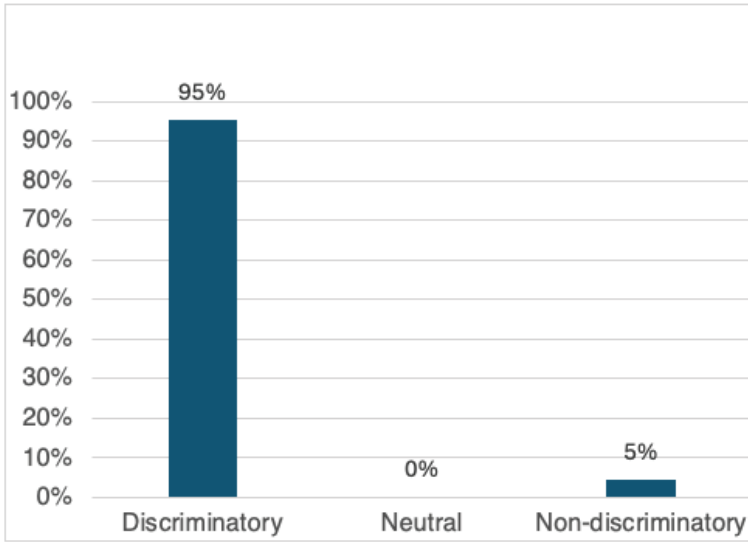

Figure 3. The graph shows the responses of participants regarding the early representation of Nubians in the media.

commercial success of their productions, reinforcing negative stereotypes and continuing a cycle of profit-driven exploitation.

Dr. Ali-Bik believes that the government has failed to protect these minorities, including Nubians, and has not taken sufficient steps to include them in Egyptian media production and media channels. This exclusion exacerbates the issue, leaving Nubians underrepresented and inaccurately portrayed in mainstream media. Moreover, he indicates that he: "blames the Egyptian cinema which has focused since the 60s on only promoting pan-Arabism as the sole national identity of all Egyptians neglecting and erasing the identities of all other minorities such as Nubians, Amazig, and Bedouin Egyptians. It was a mistake to perform this homogeneous anti-diversity policy that disintegrated multiculturalism without considering the rich history of Egypt's cultural diversity, e.g., Pharaohs, Romans, Copts, Ottomans, etc."

All the participants are aware that portraying Nubians as underprivileged and low-paid workers is derived from the fact that these were typical professions occupied by those who migrated to Cairo and Alexandria in the early 20th century, particularly during the significant relocations because of the High Dam construction between 1902 and 1964. These early migrations were largely driven by limited educational opportunities and the well-earned reputation of Nubians as trustworthy, diligent, hardworking, honest, and faithful individuals.

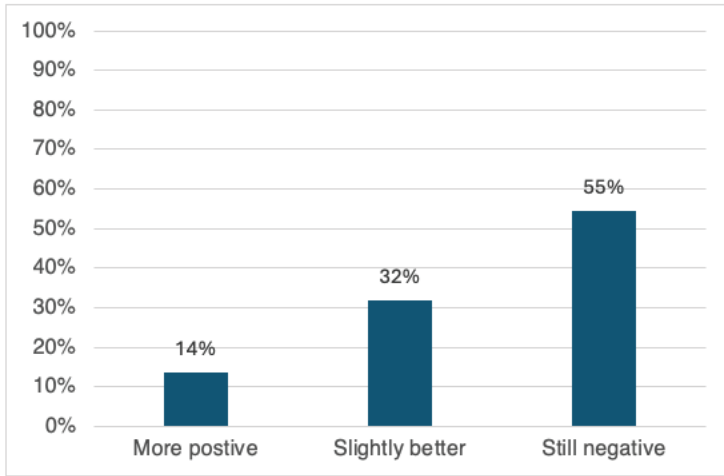

Figure 4.
The graph exhibits the distribution of the recent representations of Nubians in the media.

However, Nubians continue to be depicted primarily in lower-class jobs, overlooking the distinguished and reputable careers they hold today. Participants noted that among the discriminatory attitudes reflected in the media towards Nubians is the stigma associated with their use of unintelligible or incompetent Arabic and their dark skin. The media extensively and offensively emphasizes these pejorative images, perpetuating negative stereotypes prevalent in Egypt.

Have the Nubian representations in the media recently changed?
Figure 4 shows that 55% of the participants believe that there are still negative representations of Nubians in the media channels. In comparison, 32% think there is a slightly positive attitude in their pictures. Additionally, 14% of total responses generally maintain a more positive change. Participant 17, a thirty-three-year-old female who lives in Cairo, remarked that the situation remains the same with "abusive and derogatory references. No one cares about getting to know the real Nubians or their culture." Similarly, participant 11, a fifty-year-old female expressed her disappointment with the current portrayal of Nubians in the media, particularly the use of heavily accented Arabic which often contains linguistic errors.

On the other hand, participant 21, a young male in his twenties, observed a slight improvement in the representation of Nubians on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as some TV shows and programs. However, participant 20, a thirty-year-old male participant, stated that "you will not be able to find a single Nubian show host. They do not look at us as Egyptian." Over-

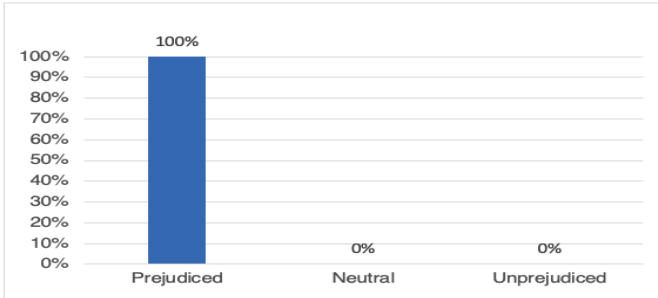

Figure 5. The graph presents Nubians views regarding their portrayals in movies and soap operas.

all, Nubians are still treated and portrayed in a condescending and patronizing way. Nevertheless, there is a slightly more constructive depiction of Nubians nowadays, it remains limited and bound to specific venues and platforms such as social media, documentaries, and talk shows. That being said, the following discussion focuses on participants' views regarding the representation of Nubians in movies and soap operas. Discussions of media platforms such as social media are outside the scope of this paper.

Portrayals of Nubians in movies and soap operas

There is a total consensus among Nubians that there is a high prejudice and bigotry in Egyptian soap operas and movies as shown in Figure 5. A sixty-year-old speaker asserts that "not only there is bullying and mockery, but also direct insults and slurs on films and soap operas." Another female speaker in her thirties mentioned that non-Nubian Egyptians are ignorant of Nubians, their culture, and their language, adding " I do not understand why characters feel the need to use blackface when pretending to be or imitating Nubians. It seems like they fail to recognize that Nubians, like many other ethnic groups, have a range of skin tones and shades. This crude portrayal oversimplifies the diversity within the Nubian community and reinforces harmful stereotypes, reducing an entire group of people to a single, inaccurate characteristic. Such depictions are not only misleading, but also disrespectful as they ignore the complexity of Nubian identity and culture. It is disheartening that, rather than portraying Nubians accurately, the media resorts to such reductive and disrespectful depictions." Many participants also reported several negative indexes and attitudes in film and showed productions, including racism, belittling, generalization, and bias that stigmatize and defame their reputations.

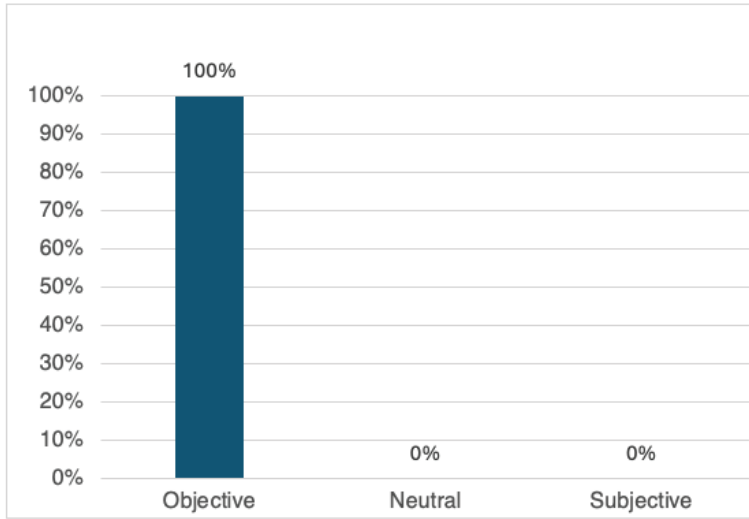

Figure 6.
The graph exhibits objective Nubian portrayal in documentary movies.

Depictions of Nubians in documentary movies

Alternatively, Nubian representations in documentary movies are very objective, as shown in Figure 6 below. The widespread consensus responses indicate that the documentary movies represent authentic images and pictures of the Nubian culture, language, lifestyle, values, and traditions. Participant 9, a sixty-year-old female speaker commented, "these documentaries play a role in preserving the Nubian heritage and culture." I believe that documentary movies, unlike fictionalized movies, do not target profit, but rather the true people and cultures. Several recently produced documentaries about Nubians are available on YouTube, covering topics like food, the Nile River sacredness, handicrafts, weddings, homescapes, and customs.

Notable examples include /a:j-ga ɟilli/ "Remember Me",[39] uploaded in 2011, and /sono/ "Roots" in 2020,[40] both of them offering viewers a more accurate and respectful look at the richness of Nubian culture.

How are the Nubians portrayed in music video cips?

Similarly, music video clips have an essential and promising role in maintaining the Nubian language and cultural heritage.[41] These music video clips are also accessible on YouTube and discuss vital issues such as migration, relocation, family bonds, solidarity,

39 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X5bmom-2SA (accessed December 2024).
40 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUoclu5ft-E (accessed December 2024).
41 In this study, music video clips refer to recorded video clips or filmed performances usually accompanied by dancing, visual images, and musical instruments intended to promote and showcase artists and cultures and marketing for their albums.

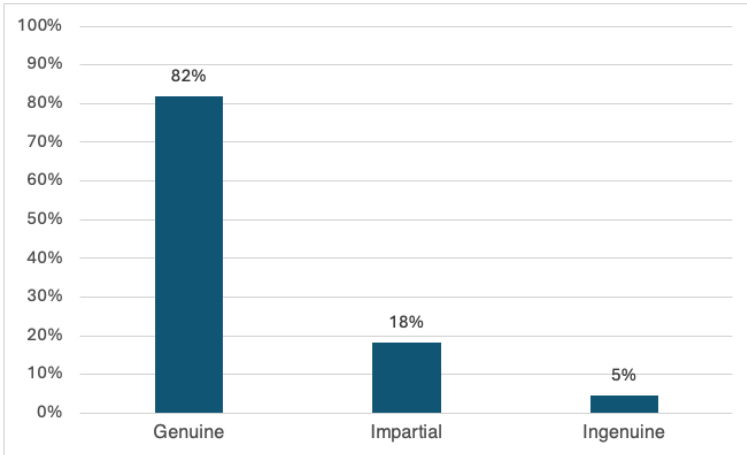

Figure 7. The graph shows responses of Nubian participants about their portrayal in music videos.

religion, and other inspirational themes. Figure 7 presents question five discussion results, and we can see that most participants agree that the Nubians are genuinely represented in music video clips (80%). The impartiality of Nubian representations in music video clips amounts to 18% compared to the frequency of the ingenuine representations of Nubians in YouTube video clips.

Participant 22, a young male in his twenties, explained that Nubian music video clips have "Touched the hearts and souls of millions of non-Nubian Egyptians and they know some songs by heart, even if they do not understand the Nubian language." Conversely, participant 13, a fifty- two-year-old female speaker, believes that most of the videotaped songs are not authentic as they are filmed exclusively in the western part of Aswan and have several overgeneralized elements. She also noted that "many people dancing in these music video clips are not Nubians and cannot dance as Nubians." Agreeing with the majority of the participants, I believe that Nubian songs, whether they are audio or video recorded, are powerful tools for portraying the real Nubian culture and preserving both language and tradition. Moreover, they have had a positive impact on both Nubian and non-Nubian Egyptians, helping to keep the Nubian music and folklore alive.

Figure 8.
A picture of Mohamed Mounir, a Nubian Egyptian legend singer and actor. Source: Essam (2022).

The role played by Mounir and his songs in promoting Nubian culture and language

While discussing their portrayal in the videotaped songs, all Nobiin participants referred to Mohamed Mounir, a popular and accomplished Fadija Nobiin singer and actor. Mounir, who sings in both Arabic and Nobiin incorporates diverse musical genres into his work, including Egyptian, Nubian, blues, jazz, and reggae. Widely regarded as an iconic artist, he is affectionately known by his fans in both Egypt and Germany as /il-malik/ "The King", a title inspired by one of his popular plays.

Mounir is among the Nubians who were displaced to Cairo following the floods and the construction of the Aswan High Dam. He addresses prfound philosophical, social, and political issues throughout his songs. Over his career, he has performed in twelve movies, four TV shows, three plays, and released more than 24 albums.

Of his 350 songs, approximately ten are in the Nubian language, some of which have been translated into Arabic and are accessible on platforms YouTube and social media.

In 2016, Mounir starred in the TV show titled/il-muʏannj/ "The Singer," which aired on television and YouTube. The TV show revolves around Mounir's personal and professional life, his Nubian heritage, and raising important issues for Nubians in Egypt including Nubian forced relocations, the sacredness of the Nile River to Nubians, and various Nubian customs and home lifestyles.

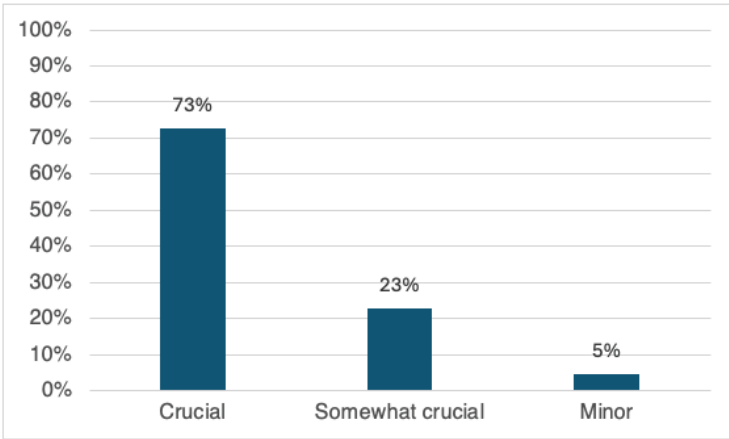

Figure 9.
The graph reflects the participants' views about Mounir's role.

In an interview with the Egyptian pop singer, Mounir was asked about his Nubian roots and history during his lifetime.[42] In responding to this question, Mounir asserts that he does not

> understand why the words "Nubia" and "Nubian" have become such a problem, why it's taken this racial direction [...] I've always wished that the Nubian culture would be treated as a distinct and special culture within the Egyptian culture. I think it is a good thing to have a culture within a culture. The subcultures won't be conflicting but would contribute and compliment the other. The international community did not understand the magnitude of the tragedy the free soldiers committed against the Nubians. They drove them out of their homes and didn't attempt to preserve their culture.

With that mentioned, I was eager to know what the participant thinks about his role in promoting and preserving the Nubian culture and language. As shown in Figure 9, the total of speakers who believe that Mohamed Mounir plays a crucial role in supporting the Nubian language, culture, and people is 73% or sixteen participants. In comparison, 23% (five participants) stated that his role is only partially crucial, with limited contributions. Additionally, 5% (one participant) noted that Mounir played a minor role. Participant 2 who is a male in his seventies noted that "Mounir was able to draw attention to Nubians and their language through the few Nubian songs, to some extent." He added that Mounir "deforms the traditional Nubian music by mixing up different genres and tones,

42 Afropop Worldwide interviewed Mohamed Mounir in July 2011 and published in April 2012. The hosts of the show, Banning Eyre and Sean Barlow wrote and conducted the radio broadcasted interview with Mounir discussing the Egyptian revolution.

Figure 10. The picture portrays a woman and a man wearing traditional Nubian clothing. Source: Twitter (2000).

however, he slightly helped in raising awareness of our language and culture." On the other hand, participant 10, a male in his fifties, elaborated that Mounir "plays a tremendous role in increasing awareness about Nubians."

Non-Nubian Egyptians know some of his songs by heart even without understanding them. He further explained that Mounir's music often incorporates traditional Nubian rhythms and themes, which resonate with listeners across different backgrounds.

The authenticity of the white /galla:bi:jja/ for men and the black /ɟarɟa:r/ for women used in music video clips and documentaries

The traditional Nubian clothing is white /galla:bi:jja/, "a white garment" for males, and a black /ɟarɟa:r/, "a black dress, usually colored clothing underneath it," for females, as shown in the picture above. Throughout videotaped songs and even documentaries, Nubian men are usually depicted wearing a /galla:bi:jja/, while women wear /ɟarɟa:r/ and headscarves. Discussion question seven aimed to show how the participants feel about the recurring pattern of clothing authenticity in the production of songs and documentary movies.

The survey found that 77% of the participants concluded that the white /galla:bi:jja/ and the black /ɟarɟa:r/ are traditional and national Nubian clothing, and hence, it is an authentic visual representation that reflects reality and ethnic apparel. However, 23% of participants considered these garments as only partially authentic and realistic, noting that they are typically worn on special occasions, while regular daily clothes are also common. Participant 16, a thirty-eight-year-old male, stated that "there is nothing wrong with portraying traditional Nubian clothing, but it should be more diverse reflecting

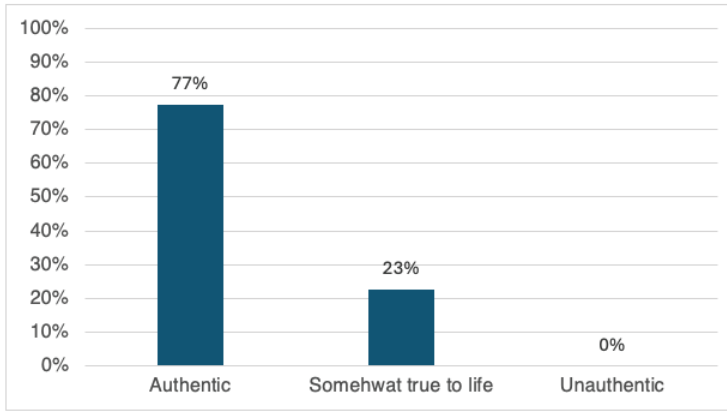

Figure 11. The graph compares the distribution of the clothing authenticity utilized in music songs and documentaries.

daily regular apparel too." On the contrary, participant 1 who is a seventy-year-old male speaker, indicated that he longs to "visit Aswan to wear his white /galla:bi:jja/ and turban. It makes me alive and proud." The difference between the participants' responses, in this case, is based on whether the participants are from urban (Cairo) or non-urban cities (Aswan and Luxor), age differences, and whether they are native or heritage speakers of Nobiin.

Figure 11 shows the frequency of participants' responses to the distribution of the authenticity of Nubian clothing representations in music video clips and documentary movies. Interestingly, the age range of the five participants who believe that clothing authenticity in music video clips is partially true to life, amounting to 23% of clothing authenticity in music video clips data, is from the twenties to forties and they are all heritage Nubian speakers, born and raised in Cairo. The traditional national Nubian clothing is still used nowadays and is a unique part of the Nubian culture, so visually presenting the traditional apparel in media productions is a remarkable and distinctive feature to honor the culture.

Nubian costumes used by music bands on YouTube and TV shows

Moving from the apparel represented and utilized in videotaped songs and documentaries, we are now in a position to present the discussion findings on the Nubian clothing used by music bands on YouTube and TV shows. Music art-pop bands performing in several areas and platforms wear and portray non-traditional Nubian costumes that are characterized by unusual patterns or designs and very bright colours, as shown in the picture below.

When asked about their opinions, all the participants (100%) entirely agree that the costumes used by art-pop musical bands are

Figure 12. The picture represents unconventional Nubian costumes used by art-pop bands. Source: Blomqvist (2012).

unauthentic and misleading representations of Nubians and their traditional apparel. Dr. Mohamed Taha, a Nubian instructor and language editor, shared during our discussion a few pictures of the unconventional costumes, adding "I do not know why they use these bright overexaggerated colors with weird patterns to portray us." He reports that he was pleased and honored to be hired as a proof-reader and language editor to /ma: wara: al-tˁabi:jʕa/ "Paranormal," a soap opera streamed on Netflix in 2020:

> I was working with clothes and the Nubian language authenticity as well as pronunciation with the actors and actresses. It was one of the limited occasions in which they work with a Nubian linguist to get a real representation of Nubians.

Similarly, a fifty-year-old female speaker expressed her disagreement with these costumes commenting "Not only they use unauthentic clothing that stands out negatively, but they depict false and fabricated pictures of Nubians." Figure 13 exemplifies the discussion results of costumes used by musical bands on shows and programs.

The portrayal of Nubians in the /Bakka:r/ cartoon

The last discussion question was dedicated to learning about the opinions of the participating speakers in a famous Egyptian cartoon show /Bakka:r/ initially broadcasted on TV in the late 1990s. The show revolved around a young Nubian Egyptian boy named /Bakka:r/, his pet goat /Raʃi:da/, and his family and friends. The soundtrack for /Bakka:r/ was sung by Mohamed Mounir and there are several Nubian songs during the series by other singers. There are ten seasons of the cartoon show and the latest release was in

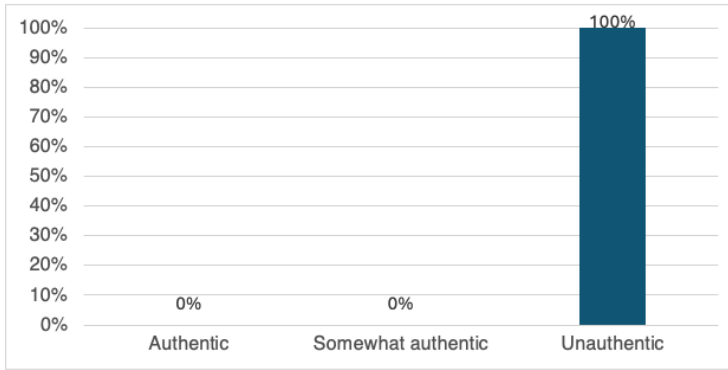

Figure 13. The graph shows the communal agreement of the costume unauthenticity.

2016. Figure 14 shows a poster of /Bakka:r/ and some of the main characters in the animated series.

Figure 15 shows considerable disagreement on Nubian representation in the /Bakka:r/ cartoon: more than half of the participants (55%) consider Nubian representation in */Bakka:r/* as realistic, 32% as realistic to some degree, and 18% as unrealistic. In other words, 55% of the participants denoted that the cartoon show has positive and realistic representations of Nubians. Despite the exaggeration in the costumes and the heavy accent of some characters, it is very popular among Egyptian children. Some participants (32%) thought the show was relatively realistic with odd fictitious adventures, /Bakka:r/'s pet goat, and unconventional clothing. However, those participants agree that it has a positive impact on promoting the Nubian culture and it also has some realistic elements such as the music and songs utilized in the animated show. Also, 18% of the participants concluded that */Bakka:r/* is an unrealistic portrayal of Nubians with negative stereotypes and negative indexes such as the dark skin color of all the Nubian characters, the heavy stereotypical accent of /Bakka:r/'s uncle, and used clothes.

Participant 4, a sixty-year-old male speaker, conveyed that "/Bakka:r/" is the first cartoon attempt to shed light on the Nubian culture. Although the scriptwriter of the animated show is not Nubian and did not go in-depth in portraying the culture, the participant noted that "considering it is the first attempt to represent Nubia, I view it, overall, with some reservations, as a positive and realistic portrayal of Nubians." In contrast, participant 15, a man in his forties, remarked that

> the idea to have a pet goat is ridiculous and far from realistic. It does not differ from Nubian representations in movies and soap operas embedded with racist and derogatory references. On top of that, the

Figure 14. A picture of Bakkar, his pet goat, and his friends. Source: Egyptian Radio and Television Union (2015).

stories do not portray Nubian tales, but rather tales of gangs and antiquities theft.

Participant 19, a forty-year-old female observed that /Bakka:r/ is a "very popular cartoon among Egyptian children and my children. It shows the Nubian values and heritage."

As shown in the nine discussion questions, the focus group highly agrees on numerous discussion points, including the early discriminatory representations of Nubians in the media, the prejudiced portrayal of Nubians in movies and soap operas, the positive depiction of Nubians in documentaries, and the unauthentic costumes used by musical bands. The second highest frequency, as indicated in discussion questions 5-7, is the genuine presentation of Nubians in music video clips, the crucial role played by Mounir in spreading awareness of the Nubian language and culture through his influential music and artistic vision, and the authenticity of apparel portrayed in documentaries and videotaped songs. More than half of all participants (55%) agreed on the ongoing negative indexes shown in the media and the real portrayal of Nubians shown in the */Bakka:r/* cartoon.

Moving forward: What can be done?

The discussion findings confirm the existence of stereotypical and stigmatized indexes associated with Nubians, which are frequently employed by media makers. These persistent negative and pejorative portrayals that are extensively emphasized have influenced some Nubians to prioritize speaking Arabic with their children to mitigate the risk of mockery, discrimination, and bullying. Despite the stigmatized representations, many Nubian speakers have a

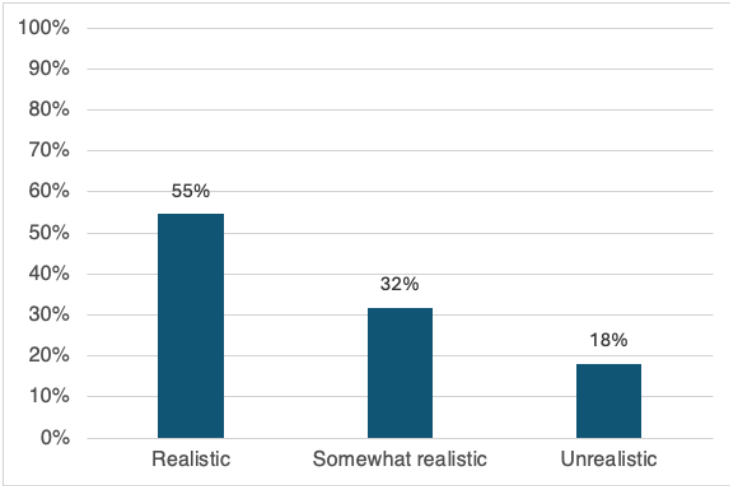

Figure 15.
The graph exhibits the participants' views regarding the Nubian representations in /Bakka:r/ Cartoon.

positive attitude toward learning their mother tongue to preserve their language, identities, and cultural ideologies.

Moreover, Nubians actively and continuously denounce and condemn racist references and insults on social media and other platforms, advocating for appropriate and truthful representations in the media that honor their status as Egyptian citizens. Prominent Nubian singers such as Ahmed Mounib, Khedr El-Attar, Hamza El Din, Mohamed Mounir, and others play a significant role in preserving the language and culture. Their music often features traditional themes and rhythms, and several Nubian music video clips are translated into Arabic to raise awareness and make the language accessible to younger generations whose primary language may be Arabic. The influence of these artists extends beyond entertainment; it serves as a bridge, connecting diverse audiences to the rich tapestry of Nubian life and history. In doing so, they not only challenge stereotypes, but also promote greater acceptance and understanding of Nubians within Egyptian society.

In addition, numerous Facebook and YouTube channels have recently been established by and for Nubians, aimed at promoting their culture and heritage while reviving their language.

Among the YouTube social forums are "Nub Tube" and "I and Nuba Channel."[43] Through these initiatives, Nubians are creating a positive stance, emphasizing their identities, their language and cultural values, and their true characteristics and traits. By refusing to accept stereotypes and negative indexes, they leverage these

43 See https://www.youtube.com/%40NubaTubeChannel (accessed December 2024) and www.youtube.com/@قناةالنوبة-ط7ع (accessed December 2024) respectively.

platforms to spread awareness about themselves and their rich cultural heritage through social media, music, documentaries, and online content. This proactive approach not only challenges existing prejudices but also fosters a greater understanding and appreciation of Nubian identity within the broader Egyptian society.

Public awareness and counterstereotypes are strongly needed among Egyptians, Nubians, and non-Nubians to construct positive stances and provide authentic representations of the Nubian language and culture. The Egyptian government should consider making the Nubian language an official language alongside Arabic to revitalize this endangered language and support all Egyptian minority groups, including Nubians. Incorporating information about Nubians and their culture in school curriculums would further raise awareness and reduce discrimination. More importantly, media makers need to recognize the harm caused by inaccurately and unjustly portraying Nubians and other indigenous minorities through negative and derisive stereotypes.

Nubians and non-Nubians who appreciate and admire the Nubian language and culture actively challenge negative stereotypes by voicing their opinions, condemning such biases, and creating platforms that authentically represent their identity and heritage. One example is the Art of Nubia website,[44] which features a variety of sections dedicated to the Nubian language, books about the language, proverbs and wisdom, courses and lessons, songs, history, Nubian literature, dance, and weddings. This impressive initiative was founded and is maintained by Elia Moor, a distinguished Swiss researcher. In addition to translating Nubian texts and literature from German into English, she personally funds and develops the website. With her expertise as a computer and web developer, Moor has made the site accessible in multiple languages, including Arabic, English, German, French, and Italian. Her vision is to create a comprehensive encyclopedia about Nubia. Moor explains that "the website's mission is to help preserve a culture and language she deeply loves and admires for its rich history, ethical values, and simplicity." Through this initiative, she hopes to raise awareness of this remarkable culture and combat racism and discrimination.

Another example is the NAPATA website,[45] which is currently undergoing redesign. Similar to the Art of Nubia, NAPATA provides information on Nubian poetry, music, language, history, and heritage. As a non-profit organization, NAPATA is dedicated to serving the needs of rural Nubian communities and other regions, with a focus on promoting Nubian heritage, culture, and language.

44 https://artofnubia.com/index.html (accessed December 2024).
45 https://www.napata.org/language.html (accessed December 2024).

Significant effort to counter negative stereotypes is made by the Nubian Cultural Center for Social Development in Aswan, Egypt. This organization works to preserve and promote Nubian heritage through educational programs, workshops, and cultural events. By offering classes in the Nubian language, organizing traditional music and dance performances, and hosting exhibitions on Nubian history, the center provides a platform for the Nubian community to express their identity and challenge stereotypes. It also fosters dialogue between Nubians and non-Nubians, encouraging understanding and appreciation of Nubian culture. Through initiatives like these, Nubians not only work to preserve their heritage, but also actively counter the negative portrayals often propagated by media and mainstream narratives.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the frequent stereotypes and negative indexes associated with Nubians in the Egyptian media, focusing on the recurring linguistic, visual, and narrative tools that perpetuate these harmful portrayals. These depictions, which include linguistic markers such as broken Arabic, character traits, dress codes, and the exaggerated darkening of skin color, are systematically employed to create and sustain second-order indexes of inferiority and backwardness. By examining the metalinguistic discourse in films and soap operas, I highlighted how the media persistently relies on a narrow and reductive portrayal of Nubians, reinforcing negative images in the public consciousness. The consistent use of these linguistic and visual cues reflects the limited and stereotypical repertoire that has dominated — and continues to dominate — Nubian representation in Egyptian media.

Despite this long-standing stigmatization, Nubians continue to resist these constructed stereotypes. They challenge these media portrayals through various avenues, including social media, music, and cultural preservation initiatives, aiming to present more authentic and empowering representations of their language, culture, and identity. While media power is heavily centralized in Cairo — allowing it to dominate and marginalize other ethnicities, including Nubians — this resistance underscores a critical pushback against misrepresentation.

The second part of the article reveals how native Nobiins perceive their portrayal in the media, revealing both their frustration with the negative stereotypes and their pride in positive representations, especially in documentaries and music video clips. Moving forward, it is imperative that these stereotypes be dismantled, and that

awareness be raised among all Egyptians — both Nubians and non-Nubians — about the harmful impact of these depictions. Without such change, new generations of Nubians will continue to bear the emotional and social costs of these negative portrayals, enduring discrimination and marginalization. For Nubian identity and culture to flourish, public discourse must shift toward a more respectful and inclusive portrayal, reflecting the rich cultural contributions Nubians have made to Egyptian society.

Appendix 1: Discussion questions

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this discussion. The discussion will take between 15 to 20 minutes. I have a few background questions for you before starting our discussion.

- Name:
- Education:
- Age:
- Place of Residence:

I have nine questions and I will start the discussion by showing you some pictures to help with our discussion and then we can talk about them and elaborate on the target questions.

1. Have you seen these pictures before? Did you see any of these movies? If yes, what do you think about the early Nubian representations in the Egyptian media?
2. Now, look at these pictures from several soap operas. Have the Nubian representations in the Egyptian media recently changed? Can you explain your opinion with some examples?
3. Could you tell me about the Nubian portrayals in the movies and soap operas? How do you feel about these portrayals?
4. Does the Nubian portrayal in documentary movies differ from their representation in movies and soap operas? Please explain and provide some examples.
5. Now, let's move to music video clips. How are Nubians portrayed in music video clips? What do you think about this representation in terms of how genuine it is?
6. Mohamed Mounir is one of the famous Nubian singers. Do you think he plays a role in promoting the Nubian culture and language? How so? If yes, how do you describe this role?
7. Now let's talk about Nubian clothing used in most music video clips. How do you feel about the use of the white /galla:bi:jja/, and the black /ɟarɟa:r/?

8. How do the Nubian costumes used by music bands on TV shows and YouTube differ from the clothes used in music video clips? Are the costumes used by the music bands authentic? Please explain and provide some examples.
9. Have you heard of the cartoon /Bakka:r/? What do you think about it? How are Nubians represented in the cartoon? Do you believe that their representations are realistic?

Appendix 2: IPA transcription of Arabic

Appendix 2 provides a description of the Arabic IPA Arabic sounds used in this paper.

Consonants		Consonants	
IPA	Grapheme	IPA	Grapheme
ʔ	ء	tˤ	ط
b	ب	ðˤ	ظ
t	ت	ʕ	ع
θ	ث	ɣ	غ
ʤ or g	ج	f	ف
ħ	ح	q	ق
x	خ	k	ك
d	د	l	ل
ð	ذ	ɬ	ل
r	ر	m	م
z	ز	n	ن
s	س	h	ه
ʃ	ش	a/at	ة
sˤ	ص	w	و
dˤ	ض	j	ي

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The Homescapes of the Manasir: A Book Review of Welsby, Derek A. (ed.), *Archaeology by the Fourth Nile Cataract. Survey and Excavations on the Left Bank of the River and on the Islands between Amri and Kirbekan. Volume I: Landscape, toponyms and oral history and the people, their settlements, architecture and land use before the Merowe Dam* [=Sudan Archaeological Research Society Publication Number 26], London 2023. Pages 248 (thereof, 3 in Arabic) + xxxii.

Alexandros Tsakos

The volume at hand is, as stated in its summary (pp. xxx-xxxi), "the first of several which will present in detail the results of the research undertaken by the Sudan Archaeological Research Society (SARS) as a part of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project (MDASP)." By this statement alone, one should welcome most warmly this publication, since it is launching a series of volumes that will make

public the immense data collected during the MDASP since the completion of the project in 2007. SARS has announced five more volumes (p. xxx), i.e. vol. II: Gazetteers of sites discovered; vol. III: The excavations; vol. IV: The artefacts; vol. V: Bioarchaeology; vol. VI: The rock art and rock gongs. The publication of the first volume encourages us to hope that MDASP will not repeat the mistakes of the Aswan High Dam Campaign in the 1960s that, despite the efforts of some missions,[1] remain largely unpublished. We await a third generation of Nubiologists to finish the task of completing those publications. And of course, trusting that SARS will complete their own mission's task, they will have set a good example for those responsible for the other concessions awarded during the salvage campaign.

This project's official birth took place in London in May 2003 during the annual SARS colloquium at the British Museum. The project aimed to salvage the cultural heritage of the lands upstream from the Fourth Cataract, an archaeologically very little-known region that would be flooded by the then largest hydroelectric project in Africa, the so-called Merowe Dam. The idea for a dam in that region was first proposed in 1943, but the plan only materialized half a century later and after a lot of dramatic political changes in Sudan, as well as technical and logistical updates to the original scheme. Appeals for salvage campaigns were first launched by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) in 1988, but the first concessions were awarded only in 1996 to the Gdansk Archaeological Museum Expedition (GAME) and three years later to SARS. By 2003, twelve missions were awarded concessions and the entire area to be flooded, from the dam construction site to the island of Mograt, became the focus of archaeological work in Sudan for the rest of the first decade of the 21st century. The editor of the volume, Derek Welsby, head of the SARS mission at the MDASP, describes the history of the project in the first chapter of the volume (pp. 1—14).

Like all salvage projects, MDASP encompassed the study of the widest possible span of cultural horizons and had a multidisciplinary character. The datasets collected, analyzed, and interpreted were immense and the effort undoubtedly formidable. Led by Derek Welsby of SARS and Salaheldin Mohamed Ahmed of NCAM — who also authored the volume's preface — the MDASP team deserves high praise for successfully navigating daunting logistical and research challenges.

1 The results of the Scandinavian Joint Expedition are the only complete; Adams has done tremendous work with Ceramics, Christian Architecture, Kulubnarti, Meinarti, Qasr Ibrim, and the West Bank Survey; and finally, there are fourteen volumes published by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition. For the latest complete bibliography about the Aswan High Dam Campaign, see Carruthers, *Flooded Pasts*, 2022, pp. 286—310.

The present reviewer has worked with different missions in the frame of the MDASP (see, for example, Plate 1.9 in p. 11 of the volume) and knows from first-hand experience the difficulties that the missions faced. Reflecting on those years spent working against the clock, one realizes we weren't just documenting the end of traditional life at the Fourth Cataract; we were witnessing the final moments of the landscape exactly as it was when we first arrived in the early 2000s. This is particularly true for the Dar el Manasir, the territory of the tribe most affected by the dam building. Despite appeals from the Manasir authorities to oppose the Sudanese dictatorship during the MDASP period, the project's leadership refused to intervene. Instead, they accused local inhabitants of attempting to instrumentalize archaeologists as shields in their struggle to remain on their ancestral lands.[2] Perhaps the themes of this opening volume ("Landscape, toponyms and oral history and the people, their settlements, architecture and land use before the Merowe Dam"), focusing on the life that the international multidisciplinary expeditions encountered in the Fourth Cataract, can be seen as an expression of regret for what was irreversibly lost.

Nonetheless, thanks to the MDASP not all was lost. Testimony is born by publications like the volume under review here. The datasets collected concern fields as diverse as archaeology, architecture, geology, anthropology, zoology, botany, ethnography, linguistics, and all sister disciplines with a focus primarily on the past (for a complete overview of the contents, see the Appendix to this review). Given this breadth of research, it is difficult to review the scientific rigor of this suite of chapters in depth. It is unwise to claim expertise on all of the fields that a volume such as this one covers. There is, however, space for discussing the choices in the way that these studies are presented. Furthermore, half of *Archaeology by the Fourth Nile Cataract* focuses on "The Homescapes of the Manasir.' This exploration of one of the region's most sensitive cultural losses is particularly timely for this volume of Dotawo, which is dedicated specifically to the theme of "Nubian homescapes."

But to begin with, the volume's first two chapters after Welsby's introduction deal with the natural landscape that was lost. In Chapter 2, Pawel Wolf (director of the Anglo-German expedition working in the most downstream stretches of the SARS concession), Baldur Gabriel, Robert Bussert, and Ronny Schomacker describe "The landscape of the Fourth Nile Cataract and its geomorphologic evolution" (pp. 15 — 45); while Arnaud Malterer provides a summary of the master thesis that he wrote in Chapter 3 titled "Merowe Dam Project. Land use and Vegetation in the Flooding Area of a planned

2 See Hafsaas-Tsakos, "Ethical Implications of Salvage Archaeology and Dam Building."

Hydrodam in Northern Sudan" (pp. 46—78). Both chapters are very rich in information and set in place the environment upon which humans developed the cultures that were hosted in the Fourth Cataract of the Nile region. The scientific accuracy of the descriptions is impressive in both chapters. There is, however, a critical point to be made about parts of Chapter 2, namely that the terminology is so dense that it becomes difficult to follow the argument. Therefore, the importance of Chapter 2 for non-specialists might be restricted to its overall descriptions and major conclusions, which are nevertheless much more accessible to such readers through the text authored by Malterer. This observation does not diminish the value of Wolf et al's contribution, but it raises a question as to the target readership of such a publication. If this should be decided on the basis of Chapter 2, then the record is to be kept for those that in the future will need it for further studies on relevant fields; it acts as metadata to an archive. But is it necessary in the 21st century with the immensity of digital solutions to choose the vector of a printed book for such a task? One must not lose sight that a variety of readers, including (primarily?) those English-speaking deracinated locals, long for a such a "book" to remember their "paradise lost." Conversely, the goal of such publications may simply be to make data available to the specialized public, and not to create synthetic, edited overviews of topics based on the data accumulated by the researchers and interpreted by the given author(s) and editor(s) so as to be interesting for a wider—but knowledgeable—audience. Perhaps this would be a legitimate expectation after the 15 years that it took from the end of the MDASP project to the publication of the volume. The present reviewer feels that the editor of the volume *did not have the time* to choose the second option but wanted this first volume "out." The contributors had to submit their work within the publication's deadlines; this time pressure is felt elsewhere in the volume too, primarily in the many typographic mistakes and some unnecessary contradictions. The most striking example of the latter is that Volume VI on "The rock art and rock gongs," which was announced in p. xxx in the Summary of the volume, is not included in the description of the SARS' publication of the project in p. 12.

Paradoxically, a similar feeling of wanting to publish the material as quickly as possible is visible in the presentation of images. No less than 598 Tables, Plates and Figures have been printed in color! Kudos to the typesetters, printers and funders, but the density of this material has caused the dimensions of the images to shrink and makes it impossible to see the details of half of them without a magnifying glass. This issue could have been avoided with a more thought-out selection (hence the argument above) or by the creation

of a larger volume. The price difference between the printed and PDF versions is substantial (65£ vs 16£[3]) and those who choose to purchase the printed version should at least be compensated by the quality of the printed texts and images.

It remains in any case a desideratum to find one day all the datasets from the MDASP available online through a central digital repository uniting the various local physical archives that the expeditions to the Fourth Cataract have created. Such repositories are always of great importance for the dissemination of the knowledge acquired, and especially now they have become critical for the achievement of this goal due to the war that devastates Sudan and its infrastructures. Finally, they are also necessary for appreciating the contribution of Chapter 5 by M. Jalal Hashim on "Toponymy in the Fourth Cataract" (pp. 89—126). The author has assembled 308 toponyms from the SARS concession area but laments the fact that similar surveys have not been conducted in other parts of the flooded region. Even if this statement is not entirely correct, (if one looks for example into the work conducted by the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition (HUNE),[4]) it is nevertheless true that it will be a tremendous task to retrieve the relevant information from the datasets of the various missions. This information is undoubtedly registered, but apparently neither systematized nor standardized according to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that Jalal Hashim respects (see p. 89). The author also calls for action with what remains from Manasir memory through interviews with the resettled population for as long as they remember the landscape they were forced to abandon (see p. 91). All of this data needs a digital repository that will assemble, preserve and disseminate the acquired through the MDASP knowledge. The work by Jalal Hashim may serve as a prototype for the studies to be conducted in the missions' archives and among the Manasir.

Of equal value are his efforts to assemble "the oral history of the Manasir," the title of his other contribution in the volume, where it is placed as chapter 4 (pp. 79—88). Against the grain of etic approaches to the past of the Fourth Cataract region, inevitably due to the focus on archaeological research conducted by foreign archaeological missions, the study by Jalal Hashim has a double advantage: first, it gives voice to the local population before their resettlement, creating a much-wanted emic perspective on the Manasir past; and it accommodates the traditional means of history-making among the peoples of the Middle Nile region, namely through oral narratives and a discourse based on genealogies. An

3 https://www.archaeopress.com/Archaeopress/Products/9781803274959 (last accessed December 2025).

4 See for example, Haberlah, "Cultural Landscape of Dar al-Manasir."

important aspect of this approach is that it also moves the women of the region from the backstage of research on the Sudanese past and into the forefront of life in the Dar al Manasir, recognizing their role as stakeholders of the tribal memory, as well as of traditional Islamic values in both village and family life. His concluding remarks contain the most acute political statements in the entire volume concerning the traumatic experience of resettlement — also in comparison to the earlier experience of the Nubians resettled due to the flooding of Lower Nubia in the 1960s — and cautiously praising what he calls "the Local Option" Manasir, who decided to follow the line of the artificial lake created behind the Merowe Dam, changing their subsistence from farmers and pastoralists to fishermen and traders of their catch, while remaining close to their flooded ancestral lands.

These two studies create an excellent backdrop for the three last chapters of the book, which turn the attention to the homes, both as architectural creations and landscapes where the everyday life of the Manasir evolved.

Chapter 6 is authored by Rebecca Bradley and Nuha Abdel Hafiz Abdel Aziz (pp. 127—159). Its title "Dar el-Arab Fourth Cataract: 2004 Ethnographic Studies" describes its geographical focus (the most downstream area of the SARS concession and base of the Anglo-German expedition lead by Pawel Wolf) and the purpose of fieldwork conducted in 2004, namely, to collect ethnographic information among the local people. These "ethnographic studies" open with "Household studies" where they describe the architecture and the partition of activity-areas inside the homesteads of three villages. They continue with the description of various everyday activities taking place outside the homesteads, like fishing, hunting using traps, masonry, pottery, metal-working, grass-cutting, and the agricultural practice of *sallūka* (pp. 127—154). They document folkloristic traditions (pp. 154—156), where religious beliefs are also part of the material presented. And they record some local histories about the origins of people and settlements, as well as a set of customs, particularly linked with women's activities (pp. 156—159). These ethnographic studies situate the life of the Manasir beyond the architectural shells of the houses, offering insights into their lost homescapes and mental geographies. In this sense, Chapter 6 would have been better placed after chapters 7 and 8, which focus on the architectural creations, their relationship with the natural environment, and the social communities that they accommodate. But the placement of this chapter here is perhaps because it constitutes a fine complement to Jalal Hashim's chapters with their equally ethnographic focus — especially if one compares the oral

histories, the origins of the Manasir, and a certain focus on women's role, that both Bradley/Abdel Aziz and Jalal Hashim preserve for posterity.

Chapter 7, authored by the architect Nadejda Reshetnikova, is titled "Modern Vernacular Architecture and Settlements Organization at the Fourth Nile Cataract between Dar el-Arab and Dar el-Waraaq" (pp. 160 — 189). Reshetnikova not only provides excellent architectural plans and section drawings of the households she investigates, but also presents the engineering methods and tools, discusses the design, analyzes the development of the settlements, and contextualizes her information against an understanding of socio- economic differentiation among the inhabitants of the villages she visited.

Finally, chapter 8 by Frances Welsh is about "Architecture and life in villages of the Fourth Nile Cataract in the region of al Tiref" (pp. 190 — 238). This chapter is a continuation of Reshetnikova's in terms of the geography it covers moving upstream from Dar el-Arab, while it functions in a complementary manner since Welsh also exhaustively presents the different types of buildings, their function in the settlements, and the way they are placed inside the settlements. Welsh is especially interested in the way these buildings are adapted to the natural environment and the possibilities or constraints this imposes upon the various alternatives available to the locals.

These three chapters (6, 7, and 8) are priceless records of the Manasir homescapes that are lost forever. They preserve for posterity the cultural landscape of several villages both on the mainland and on the islands through descriptive texts, good drawings, rich photographic documentation, and some valuable societal analyses. They are complemented by published studies on modern villages of the Manasir further upstream, especially those conducted in the framework of the HUNE concession.[5] They can provide comparanda for studies of vernacular architecture in other areas of the Middle Nile region, and thus insights into the cultural particularities of the Manasir, their technical know-hows, their dependence on external impulses, and their social organization and stratification. And last but not least, they are repositories of the local memories of life in the Fourth Cataract, either for the Manasir who resettled or those who went for "the Local Option."

The volume would have profited from a more thorough copy-editing process, avoiding variations between title and sentence

5 Eigner, "Kirbekan — ein Dorf der Manasir am 4. Nilkatarakt"; idem, "Kirbekan — Ein Dorf der Manasir am 4. Nilkatarakt (Teil II)"; idem, "Kirbekân: A Village of the Manasir"; Haberlah and von dem Bussche, "Das Dorf Atoyah auf der Insel Sherari. Wandel der Siedlungsstruktur im Dar al-Manasir."

cases or orthographies of Arabic words using transliterations of different sorts. Perhaps it could also have profited from a different organization of the chapters moving from the context of the natural landscape to the settlement patterns and the toponymy, then presenting the various architectural solutions adopted by the Manasir, and having thus created the scenery for staging the Manasir people's every-day activities, genealogies, memories and beliefs. While the first volume of the SARS activities in the frame of the MDASP leaves the reader with the desire for a better editing hand, it constitutes a point of reference for the future of the studies deriving from the controversial "Archaeology by the Fourth Nile Cataract."

Appendix: The contents of the volume

- Preface. Salahedin Mohamed Ahmed
- Chapter 1: Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project. The SARS Amri to Kirbekan Survey 1999-2007. Derek A. Welsby
- Chapter 2: The Landscape of the Fourth Nile Cataract and Its Geomorphologic Evolution. Pawel Wolf, Baldur Gabriel, Robert Bussert, and Ronny Schomacker
- Chapter 3: Merowe Dam Project. Land Use and Vegetation in the Flooding Area of a Planned Hydrodam in Northern Sudan. Arnaud Malterer
- Chapter 4: The Oral History of the Manasir. M. Jalal Hashim
- Chapter 5: Toponymy in the Fourth Cataract. M. Jalal Hashim
- Chapter 6: Dar el-Arab Fourth Cataract: 2004 Ethnographic Studies. Rebecca Bradley and Nuha Abdel Hafiz Abdel Aziz
- Chapter 7: Modern Vernacular Architecture and Settlements Organization at the Fourth Nile Cataract between Dar el-Arab and Dar el-Waraaq. Nadejda Reshetnikova
- Chapter 8: Architecture and Life in Villages of the Fourth Nile Cataract in the Region of al Tiref. Frances Welsh
- Chapter 9: Bibliography for Volume I

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Hafsaas-Tsakos, H. "Ethical Implications of Salvage Archaeology and Dam Building: The Clash between Archaeologists and Local People in Dar al-Manasir, Sudan." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 11(1), pp. 49 — 76.

A Conversation with Khalid Shatta

Anna Lucille Boozer

BOOZER: Can you tell us about your background and how it inspires you?

SHATTA: My name is Khalid Mohamed Hammad Elkhatteem. My nickname is Khalid Shatta. Two years ago, my older brother told me that our great grandfather was named Shatta also.

I am Sudanese. I come from the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan, which is in the southern part of Sudan now. I was born in the Nuba Mountains but my family moved to Khartoum because of the war during that time and I grew up in Khartoum.

I think my family can say also that they are a collapse of the history of the war in Sudan. I grew up in Sudan. I can feel the way I grew up in Khartoum. I now try to understand how my family, they were trying to settle down to the new place in their home. We weren't used to it. Sudan is a very diverse country — its languages, its culture.

I grew up in Shag-al-Nil in Khartoum. In my area most of the people migrated from South Sudan, Nuba Mountains, or Darfur and most of those people are the people who moved because of the war or the dictator regime or the basic needs. So, I grew up with a lot of challenges of the basic needs of the family and also the basic needs of me to continue my school journey. It was always ups and downs.

I started art — I don't really know when did I start. Ever since I knew myself, I was drawing or painting. Art for me is not only a talent or hobby but also art is a kind of sacred space for me to escape and express myself. It's a silent language that I do understand myself.

I really like to travel and because of the situation of my family and of Sudan. My father, he passed away a long time

ago and it was very hard during that time. We suffered a lot and I turned out to live in the streets for many years. What inspires me is people and places and migration itself is an inspiration. Because now in a way I feel at home wherever I go. I start having that concept of "I'm from here. I'm a human being. I'm a special creature in this universe. Why I should locate myself and say 'I belong to this place?'"

I've been in Norway now for thirteen years in two places. And even in my country, I never stayed with my family for five years. So, the concept of family brings many questions for me. Once you have the right to stay in one place and the freedom to move that is home. Where you stay, find solace here, and how you can struggle to find a place to stay. But my soul is here in Norway now. But I am also very happy to have that concept that I also belong to another people, another country.

BOOZER: Multiple belongings.

SHATTA: Yes. And that shows also how it's a human journey. Some people are arriving and some people are falling so it leaves me to understand that all we have is civilization and history because we're all connected. And in a way to also be indigenous and native — everyone is native if you believe we came from one human family. We are the result of all this evolution. It doesn't matter where we are located. But also, I think I like history and culture, art, everything. But in a way I'm also observing.

BOOZER: It sounds like you carefully observe all of the people and places around you for inspiration. Is that right?

SHATTA: Yes. Also, yes sometimes is sad because the human history is built with blood and it is a very painful journey to reach wherever we are. But, also its full of change and challenge because sometimes you have a question, such as "what is an American"?

BOOZER: There's no simple answer to that.

SHATTA: Yeah! And also, in Sudan even in our ancient history there is a lot of sacrifice for the gods, there is also violence. It's painful but in a way, it is also interesting how we change and accept.

BOOZER: All of the growing pains that we go through.

SHATTA: Yeah. And the beauty too. In Sudan I went to the Nuba Mountains, I was very scared when I was there because there was war. I was scared to just walk into the forest. It's just war. But when I came to Norway, I became more

connected to the nature. Because when you are scared you can't enjoy the beauty around you.

BOOZER: You can't relax and observe.

SHATTA: I think places play a huge role in my artistic inspiration, so I like to travel.

BOOZER: It sounds like places, people, and deep histories inspire much of your work.

SHATTA: Yes, and also me and my journey of life.

BOOZER: Do you have any rituals or routines that help you with your creative process?

SHATTA: Actually, no, I have no routine. I just love to paint. I don't know how to express that. I don't have rituals. Sometimes my paintings inspire me. Sometimes just lying on my bed and looking at this painting seeing the canvas, the color, knowing I painted it, thinking "wow, this is nice!" And I feel good about that. Just to put my thoughts on canvas and create those kinds of shadows. Sometimes I don't understand it, but I like to not understand it. I like it that it creates a curiosity. Sometimes I can't explain my art, but, also, I feel it in my bones, I feel it in my soul. I can feel the power in it. I left my country because of my art. The government forced me to leave. I came to Europe because of my art. I won an international competition. I am here because of my art. I believe in that. Art can bring me to travel and also it can save me. I do believe in this power of art. I can see that power. Sometimes it is spiritual. It's something I don't understand also. But it is something that is very powerful. It is the essence of many things.

BOOZER: You spoke earlier about how art was your silent language and that it is a necessary form of communication for you. Although I am not an artist, it made sense to me how important it is to get something out of yourself. That art can feel true even if you don't understand it.

SHATTA: Yeah. It is beautiful.

BOOZER: How do you stay motivated to create?

SHATTA: You know, understanding also motivates me. Just to try to understand is motivating. Because understanding goes both ways. At the end of the day, it is understanding. If it is pain, you understand why it is pain. If it is happiness, you understand why it is happiness. So, for me, understanding itself motivates me.

BOOZER: So, understanding your feelings motivates you.

SHATTA: Yes, understanding what I'm passing through. For example, we're passing through hard times. For me as a Sudanese

even though I live in Norway I can see my people are just dying. There are so many people dying. But I need to understand the process of why we're having war. Also, it makes me more calm to accept the understanding rather than supporting the war. It's a really nice way of motivation.

BOOZER: You're accomplished at painting, drawing, and photography. What draws you to one medium over another? What differences do you find in your art when you change medium?

SHATTA: In my family I don't have a picture of me as a child. I had one picture when I think I was about five years or something, but I lost it.

BOOZER: Oh no!

SHATTA: Yeah! I didn't find it and my family didn't find it, the picture. But after that also I travelled a lot in Sudan. I moved to stay in different places. The first time I held a camera was with an organization for displaced children. They gave us a camera just to take a picture. I was happy! I felt I had a new eye to see things. And after that I just kept going, taking pictures. I even took photographic design at art school in Sudan. I like to take pictures but I find a different enjoyment in painting and drawing because I feel like it's all me. It's connected with my soul and my thoughts. And I feel like this is the knowledge I want to dive into more than taking pictures. But I can take pictures too. And from that time until now, I'm just painting, and I can see which level I am now. So now I'm thinking to take pictures because I feel like, wow. Because starting in 2009 I was a good photographer in Sudan and I made a lot of money from that, but it makes me very busy digitally. Now I'm more connected with my soul and my heart and my hands. I love that. And also, it gives me more perspective to create to make photographs. But also, because there are a billion great photographs. Photographs are very important, especially in the twentieth century, all of the history that changed the world through the photographs. Even the archive I'm working with in Berlin, because this is the one who did propaganda for Hitler, we see it's all about photographs. And even Mussolini it's about photographs. The assassination of Kennedy, it's about photographs.

BOOZER: The photographs are moving in a very specific way.

SHATTA: Yes. You know Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, it's the pictures. And it's important in that sense. But to paint or to draw is more meaningful. It connects me more. I feel it's

Figure 1. "The Unknown Hope (1)": Shatta's hometown in El-Korgal, Nuba Mountains, Sudan. (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

me, me. Because we are humans, we want that. We like to take the credit. Because this photograph is the work of the camera. This painting is me.

BOOZER: You feel more connected to the paintings.

SHATTA: Yes. Maybe I don't understand why. Maybe I don't have the right approach. I think this picture is the work of the camera. This painting is the work of me. But maybe I don't understand. Maybe don't have the right answer for now.

BOOZER: Or your feelings may change over time.

SHATTA: Yes.

BOOZER: We talked before this interview about a photograph that you took and I'd like to talk about it more now. Or we could talk about another piece that reminds you of homelife or disconnection that has a story behind it.

SHATTA: This one in the Nuba mountains with the white jalabiya (figure 1). This is where my mom and dad were born. And I don't know how to put it in English. You can feel the connection of home. The meaning is always very deep. The forest is home. The trees are a soul. And they are building what we call *rākūba* in Arabic.

BOOZER: A thatch hut?

SHATTA: Yes. And I really love it. The way of the motion and the connection. And even in my painting series, *The Migration of the Soul,* humans migrate from nature. When we migrated from nature, we became very harsh with each other. Because we don't have the language of the surroundings. We don't have the understanding. And I think that many

Figure 2. "The Unknown Hope (2)": Damazin Market, Blue Nile, Sudan (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

village people are more connected with nature and they know how to define themselves with basic things. But in a way, they have a real connection with their land with nature. And I felt that in this picture.

BOOZER: Yes, you can see it in the way his arms cross.

SHATTA: Yes.

BOOZER: The connection is happening between him and the land.

SHATTA: Yes, the connection. You feel like you really belong to this earth.

BOOZER: Yes, it's beautiful. I see that connection. This one (figure 2). This is the one we were talking about before our interview began, right?

SHATTA: Yes, this is the one. And on the boy's t-shirt it says "the eagle human eye". You see it?

Boozer: Yes.

SHATTA: And if you think about it, I took this photograph in 2011. Now some of them may have three or five kids. You know how it is in my culture. And think about how in this kind of situation they are the ones who are killing. They are the ones who are stealing. They are the ones who are in the war. They are everything. And even me. If I am there, I am going to do the same thing. Because this is where I was born, this is how I was raised. This is what is normal. Because in Norway the police have no guns when patrolling. Just imagine if you grow up in a place where you have gangs everywhere.

Figure 3. "The Unknown Hope (3)": Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Khartoum (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

And also, it explains the trap of the history of Sudan. You know, because we are in war for more than sixty or seventy years, and even before that we have the British and the Egyptians, and the Turkish. In Sudan we never had a rest just to settle. The culture of war is very deep. The culture of war is also mixed with slavery and I think this is still what is ruling Sudan. It doesn't matter what place in Sudan you are located. Because especially this war reflects what Sudan is. It is very fragile. There is no basis of identity. It is a mix of races. It is a mix of people struggling. It is a mix of many things. But all these things are missing one thing. We don't have institutions to hold what we need, what we want to be as Sudanese. And I think this is one of the things. And even the system of the army that we have is a system from when the British colonized. And even the problem of South Sudan. They divided it because of the lack of opportunity for education because of the many lacks. And now South Sudan is divided too. And at that time, they said it was Christianity that was the issue, but now what about Khartoum?

In a way you feel there is a country, there is a land full of minerals, full of resources, but there is no-one who belongs to it really. You can question yourself why are we like that. Even in Europe you can find a church that is four hundred years old or six hundred or more than that. They have this knowledge, these buildings. You don't feel that different from six hundred years ago. And some of those

Figure 4. "The Unknown Hope (4)": El-Haj Yousif Neighborhood, Sudan (Khalid Shatta, 2011)

buildings are better than now. And that shows how we are very far even in the history because Meroitic, Kemetic, or Kushitic civilization you can be proud of that. But maybe we don't even belong to those people. It shows the dilemma of education, academic, of things. Because we need to accept that first. We need to see where history leaves us. We need to see that more. Maybe this picture for me holds

Figure 5. "The Unknown Hope (5)": Blue Nile, Sudan (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

those ideas. Because people think the problem is just from the former regime. No. It is deeper. It is more than that.

BOOZER: There are deep roots to it and the tree keeps growing, supported by those roots.

SHATTA: Yes. Because even the people who are in charge now in Sudan. They are Sudanese from our families. They came from the same communities. So, why do we ignore that? Ah, so this picture (figure 3), I took it in Omdurman. At that time, we were moving the South Sudanese and people from the Nuba Mountains. This is before the dividing of South Sudan. So, just imagine now what is happening in Sudan. People migrate. So, this is my city.

BOOZER: I love this one (figure 4).

SHATTA: Yeah, this is really nice, you know? This guy, he's adopted. Maybe he's a soldier now. Our neighbor was the first woman where I lived to adopt. It was for me — wow — you know? Because we were living in a poor city, in a ghetto, so for me — wow — that was really nice. It was inspiring to me. And now maybe he's in high school or something.

BOOZER: It's been thirteen years now. That's a long time in a child's life.

SHATTA: Yeah. I just loved his expression.

BOOZER: Yes, his face is so sweet.

SHATTA: Yes. This is the Fulani, the Fulani people (figure 5).

BOOZER: Tell us about the Fulani.

SHATTA: The Fulani, or Housa, are people who are located in many countries in Africa. The huge Fulani community is in

Figure 6. "The Unknown Hope (6)": Shatta's hometown, El-Korgal, Nuba Mountains, Sudan (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

Nigeria. But you find them in Sudan, in Senegal, in Chad, in Mali. Not like the Dogons. But the Fulani are linked even with the Tuwari, Tugu, and have other kinds of links. They really love cows like the Nuer in South Sudan. In Sudan we know them as *Omboro*. They are very spiritual. They are Muslim but also other things. In the Nuba Mountains we

Figure 7. "The Unknown Hope (7)": El-Haj Yousif Neighborhood, Sudan (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

call in *kujur,* like voodoo, but those people also have these kinds of rituals with their cows.

BOOZER: So, they have other traditions and spiritualism entangled with Islam.

SHATTA: Yes, it is mixed because they are Muslim. Yes, all over Africa and even in Sudan where most of us are Muslim we

Figure 8. "The Unknown Hope (8)": Roseires Dam, Blue Nile at Ad Damazin, Sudan (Khalid Shatta, 2011).

have our roots in other traditions. This one is in el Kargal my hometown (figure 6). This is also Fulani.

BOOZER: Awe, so cute!

SHATTA: Yes.

BOOZER: This is a beautiful one (figure 7).

SHATTA: This is my niece.

BOOZER: She's so beautiful. Her face and the light you capture on it is just amazing.

SHATTA: It's really beautiful. This picture, I took it in a kitchen, but I took it I think with candles for light and a red lamp.

BOOZER: The lighting on it is so beautiful. Her face is so striking.

SHATTA: Now they are in a safer place. Kassala. They got out of Khartoum two months ago.

BOOZER: I'm glad to hear that…but…everyone is moving. It's so hard.

SHATTA: Yes, just imagine how tough it was for them.

BOOZER: Just to get out of the heart of the war.

SHATTA: Yes. There's one picture, I need to discuss with you, this one (figure 8). Imagine these people. They live beside the dam on the Blue Nile. Those people live just three meters from the dam and they don't have access.

BOOZER: They don't have access to the water?

SHATTA: Yes, they don't have access to the water.

BOOZER: That's incredible. They're so close.

SHATTA: Yes, I love this picture. This one is part of a series. When did I take this one? This was part of *Migration of the Soul* or *Gods in Action.* The red drawings. Should we also look at them?

Figure 9. "Migration of the Soul" (Khalid Shatta, 2019).

BOOZER: Yes, let's do that! I have them here. I really like this one (figure 9).

SHATTA: Yes, this one is nice.

BOOZER: Would you like to tell us a bit about it?

SHATTA: This one is part of *Migration of the Soul.*[1] The point is not the physical migration but the mental migration. And also, the

1 SHATTA: in "The Migration of the Soul" series I have been dealing with the way we may feel out of place. When we have to flee, from one country to another, from your home to a camp, from your worn torn village to the capital city, that is not simply physical migration but manifests in our feeling a sensation of being disconnected. Fleeing your home and having to settle in another country or a capital, where you have little resources, no connections, arriving with trauma and emotional baggage for which there might be no help available, having to carve out a place for yourself in an unfamiliar society, is an alienating experience. I make frequent use of ancient Kemetic and Cushitic symbols from the historical kingdoms of the Nile valley civilisations, the ancestors of the community in which I was born in Sudan's Nuba mountains. I want to show how our past is connected to our present selves, and that when we lose the connection to the past, we may feel displaced. When we don't

way how we feel disconnected from our own existence. For me it is also more like how we are engaging in time together. But also, time changes and many things can disappear with time, through time. For example, for us as humans — I'm just thinking, I don't know if I'm right or not — but we are the last creatures who live on this earth. When we arrived here, we found everything for us, whether through evolution or whatever. We find the trees, we find the world, we find everything. And from there we build the human civilization. And we had the first migration and it's a lot of knowledge that came from this small family of human beings. And then came the first ancient peoples the first ancient civilizations. And now we are here in, say 2000. For me, to be in 2000 — wow — just imagine that we are the product of many little, little things.

BOOZER: Many small past actions and events?

SHATTA: Yes. And when we look at this perspective, just wow. It's not about how long am I going to live, but how did I become a product of all of human evolution.

BOOZER: Coming to this body, to this place, during this period.

SHATTA: Yes, with these clothes, with this knowledge. You know? So, if you can see, there are Wifi signs. So, for us, as modern peoples, sometimes when we go to temples, or to mosques, or to church, we get shocked by what those people in ancient times created. The beauty. But for us even we have our own civilization. You are in New York City; I am in Oslo. We speak through our laptops.

BOOZER: That is its own wonder.

SHATTA: Yes. You see it is also evolution and our time. And if we brought someone from ancient times here, he would be — wow — he's going to worship us!

BOOZER: Yes, the technology we command is incredible.

SHATTA: Yes. You see, he's going to worship us. It's normal! And that's why I feel sometimes, it's like humans we have really smart and beautiful minds to create things. But when we link our soul with belief, we loose our power somehow. Also, there are the trees in the picture, human trees. It's like a forest.

know who we are, we feel lost. I also seek to explore how the alienating and seemingly chaotic state of migration connects us. Whether we have fled war and trauma or not, we face suffering and hurt, we feel disconnected and lost. Our souls may transfer - migrate, if you will - to a different place and, paradoxically, that alienating experience brings us all closer. Through exploring what I refer to as the migration of the soul, I believe that we may understand each other better. In the "Migration of the Soul" series, the sensation is of being out of place. We live in a time where many people feel a disconnection from their own bodies and existence.

Figure 10.
"Gods in Action (1)" (Khalid Shatta, 2021).

So, for me, it's about we and them. It's about our history and about our present.

BOOZER: The deep history running into the present.

SHATTA: Yes, and sometimes we forget that. That's what inspires me too. The forgetting.

BOOZER: I love this one (figure 10).

Figure 11. "Gods in Action (2)" (Khalid Shatta, 2021).

SHATTA: It is from a series called *Gods in Action.*[2] So, *Gods in Action*

2 SHATTA: The "Gods in Action" series offers a perspective on how we represent the divine through art, craft, music, and dance. As a point of departure, I want to focus on indigenous communities in multiple parts of the world, one of which includes myself as a member, as a member of an indigenous community in the Nuba mountains of Sudan. I explore how these expressions are shaped by the environment we live in, how they differ and what connects them. I want to invite you to a journey from the Nile to the Oceanic communities of the Pacific Ocean, and beyond. I explore how the divine is expressed and experienced in the

was inspired by a specific ocean. Solomon Islands and those people. The way they portray their gods is a very scary way. And even when they welcome someone, it is scary. For me, I find it very interesting how people live by the ocean. The way they are creating their gods. For me, if you live near the ocean you need to have a god that can scare the huge waves of the water. I don't know. I'm just trying to think through it. So, I call it *God's in Action* because let's imagine how God moves things. Many of us have the image of God, but where is the action?

BOOZER: He looks like a very active God here.

SHATTA: Yes, he's moving! This one is the Nile (figure 11). In Africa in general we like to organize by family and by sticking together. Sometimes I feel, in Sudan in general, we have connections with nature in a spiritual way. Because we are always symbolizing things. People portray themselves like the snake, the lion, whatever. Maybe the point is to study the movement of these animals and to portray themselves as these creatures. And also, the fish. The fish is my favorite sign. I enjoy using it in my art. And in Sudan, in the Nuba Mountains, they draw alligators, elephants, and fish in the caves. Because, as we said before, there is a lot of knowledge that we inherited through our ancestors. It came through the blood. It needs our body to relax to receive that knowledge again.

So, I feel like maybe if the wars end in Sudan it's possible to bring back again a lot of things, a lot of knowledge that we didn't understand as of now. This knowledge needs caring from the government to move forward. But, for me, I'm just saving my questions so sometimes my art is just a question for the future of how to use it in Sudan. Because sometimes I feel Sudan is just an empty place. We have to build it from scratch. And I use art sometimes as the missing home. Because here I live really good. I enjoy life. But sometimes I get this feeling of "ahhh, I came from Sudan." I remember. And I feel sad and I feel like — wow — I have to do that in Sudan. Because I feel what we are missing. What we are missing in Sudan, we are missing the foundation. This is an illustration showing question (figure 12). I love the human expression. The eyes. I paint a lot of eyes.

BOOZER: This one has so many eyes and faces. It looks like there are many perspectives on the question.

environment we live in, and in our art and rituals, as well as to explore the belief systems we use to enable ourselves to conceptualize it. And I explore how these expressions connect to a wider context, beyond the communities.

Figure 12. "Gods in Action (3)" (Khalid Shatta, 2023).

SHATTA: Yeah.

BOOZER: Thank you so much for going through these with me.

SHATTA: You're welcome. There are also many new ones.

BOOZER: How has living abroad shaped your perspective of homelife in Sudan?

SHATTA: I think living in Norway, it's a balance of understanding myself, understanding my country, understanding Norway.

Because, in a way, sometimes I feel I am missing something in Sudan. But me being here it makes it easier to observe. I become more like a watcher. I can see my tree, my journey in Sudan. I can see how I landed here. And there are many things in Sudan that I couldn't understand because of many things. Because of the basic needs, because of the war, because of the family. Every time I understand something that I used to struggle to understand. But also understanding that side of trauma and the struggle with the new world to settle in a new place. In a way it gives me rest to understand Sudan. But also, some years ago it all clashed together and I lost myself. You understand?

BOOZER: Yes.

SHATTA: Deep trauma, depression, stress, and anxiety and on top of that what's going on. Boom. It was really — wow. And now I'm just saying it's a good experience. *Yanni,*[3] I love the journey! Because also Norway, it's a place that makes me able to understand myself right now. And also, in my art journey because I made all those arts here. To make art is not an easy thing if you live in fear.

BOOZER: You need mental space in order to create.

SHATTA: Yes. For me, because of the space I manage to paint and to get inspired. Norway is good for my artistic journey. Also, it is really a good starting to know people to understand another part of the world and also to understand how we are different and how even our problems are totally different. And how our sadness could be the same volume and the same meaning as the pain of the war. People here die of depression. They die of suicide. They die with a lot of things — with the drugs or whatever. The people in Sudan, they die of starving, with the war, or with the gangs. But at the end of the day, they are both lost in themselves. They are dying. They do not exist anymore. So, I mean all suffering is a war in itself. Also, it's a good understanding for me. Because I can understand. Because many people if they live in a poor situation, they think life is like that. They think they are the only people who are suffering. But then you go out and there are other people.

BOOZER: You can get a broader perspective.

SHATTA: Yes. I am happy to experience that. Not only to live and to listen, but I am part of this system too. There are things you can't learn through reading. You have to live it. This is what I can say.

3 *Yanni* is a filler used in spoken Arabic equivalent to "like" or "you know" in English.

BOOZER: What impact do you hope your art has on others?

SHATTA: Because I paint from my soul, I believe in that. I don't know. I believe in my feelings. There are some things, even for me I do not understand, but I can see it in the way I love my art and the way other people love my art.

BOOZER: You just want for them to enjoy it and get what they want from it. Is that right?

SHATTA: No, it's not only like that. I really love my art. For me, I need it, I feel the beauty of it. And when people see that too, I see it more and I appreciate that. Wow! It means a lot to me. I attract someone through my art.

BOOZER: That it's having an impact, someone's finding meaning in it, and making a connection with you? That it helps you see your art in a new way?

SHATTA: Yes. And that's beautiful — wow — What I'm trying to say is, yeah, I appreciate that. Art, it comes from the soul. It is the language of the heart, so when people like my art it makes me feel I am honest when I am painting and when I am drawing. And also, it connects me. For instance, my art is like research. When I start a painting, I start to search. I like to go deep, and deep, and deep. And even it connects me, especially the project I'm working on now which is about history, about humans, about Sudan, Nubia, about many things. But also — wow — it's a sign of how those people find me and my art. Why me? That's why I'm saying I believe in this art.

BOOZER: How do you see art contributing to a feeling of home among the people who have been displaced due to the current war? Does art have a place in giving people a feeling of home?

SHATTA: I know we have war in Sudan. But I can't speak for any artist, but in a way, an artist needs time to observe. You can always paint. You know this painting? This is the first painting I made just about Sudan (figure 13) after I went to Cairo after one year. I campaigned about war, I campaigned about war, but I didn't feel it. You see? But me, in Cairo, I couldn't ignore it. That's why I made this painting. Because of what is going on in Sudan. It makes me have to try to understand the whole thing, how we came to this war, just to attack. To attack what is going on. Because for me, what comes out, it is part of the solution. You see now, this is part of the solution. And it is part of the problem. It's a lot of things. It's the politics. It's many things. But at the same time, art is the witness of the time. From person to person, it is different. But I don't feel I can speak about this question

Figure 13. "15th April Panic – Battle of Khartoum 2023" (Khalid Shatta, 2024).

in Sudan, but still I paint. I paint. I painted this painting because this is how I see the pain of war. But also, in a way, I guess I need to be careful also to use the art in a good way. Because now we are in a war, I am worried about Sudan... but I am not there yet. I prefer just to let it come naturally. This painting is about Sudan. And maybe critiquing the homescape because for people this is how they are feeling.

BOOZER: Their disconnect and the swarm of thoughts about war no matter where they are.

SHATTA: Yes.

BOOZER: Are there any new mediums or projects you'd like to explore?

SHATTA: Yeah, actually, last month, I was in Portugal. I went for a community called "Sacred Activism." I think now I'm looking to get in more communities. So, I need just to spend a lot of time with many indigenous communities. Because, one day I want to do this in Sudan. I felt this was something I really needed. I feel very connected with that. To be with a community. To be more spiritual with people. Tamira, it

is a place in Portugal. The founder is German. Now they are just creating space. Most of the people are from Israel, the United States, Germany, from Portugal, from Brazil. They create space just to grieve, to express themselves in art and rituals and love and sexuality and power. It's a lot of things. So, this is what I'm exploring.

BOOZER: You're always exploring.

SHATTA: Yes.